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# A Critical Study of the Colossian Epistle

Vernon Bowers

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE COLOSSIAN EPISTLE

By

Vernon Bowers

This Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of New Testament

Butler University  
School of Religion  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
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## PREFACE

This thesis is the beginning of a personal ambition which is to carefully study every book in the Bible. This study involves historical and geographical background, authorship, purpose and style of writing. Most of all my purpose in such an ambition is to form mental images of the contents of every book, and to be acquainted with the thoughts of the best scholars who have written commentaries on each particular book studied.

I am grateful to Professor Smith for his suggestion that I start with one of the smaller New Testament epistles, in particular, Colossians. I also am indebted to him for his suggestions as to a plan and method of study which could be adopted to all subsequent books of the New Testament.

The typing of this manuscript was done by Mrs. R. H. Crockett. The English quotations appearing in the text were taken from the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament. All references to Greek words in the text are taken from the Greek New Testament which was edited by Dr. E. Nestle, the sixteenth edition.

## INTRODUCTION

Among the twenty-seven books in the New Testament canon, there is an epistle addressed to the church which met at Colossae. This epistle isn't very large; in fact it barely consumes four or five pages in the entire Bible. Yet it is important; for with it there is left to the Christian world a remnant of history, both of the life of the church and of the life of her greatest apostle, which it would not have otherwise possessed. A great number of Christian communications which, if they would have been preserved, would have yielded many times over the information in the Colossian epistle. But because these are lost, there is even more reason to regard this work as one of the precious gems of the faith. It remains as one of the touchstones by which the Christian world of today can be connected with its early heritage.

Christianity is but a stream in the great movement of civilization. What a stream! When the Christian message began it swept like fire over a continent in less than a century. Its early movements cannot be traced today due to its rapidity of progress and lack of data. The clock could not be stopped at any particular time during the first hundred years, because Christianity was a constantly moving force pushing itself onward in all directions. For this reason it is a difficult task to

undertake a study of any phase of the early Christian movement, with precise conclusions as to the result of such study. However, this is just the reason why an investigation should be made of the early church and its literature. Some of the most valuable insights into Christianity are lost, because of the negligence to peer into the scenes of early discipleship. Many of the significant values expressed in the New Testament are lost or misunderstood today, because of the change in language and thought. The word, "Light," then meant a great deal more than it does today. Today it means a form of energy which radiates from the sun; but in New Testament times it meant not only energy, but mental and spiritual illumination as well, especially in the Greek speaking world. It took on even a further meaning when used in the New Testament. By this one simple illustration one can readily see the need of a study involving the literature of our religion. The purpose of any such study is to express the thought in terms of present day terminology, and yet maintain values which can be channeled to succeeding generations.

A study which purposes to survey and analyze literature must be an objective one. Then too, it must be a critical study, taking into account the best thinking on the subject and using that thinking as a means for furthering one's own investigation. This study is both objective and critical. It is of the objective nature in that there will

be no attempt to validate any thesis throughout the discussion, but simply to present the thinking of scholars on selected phases of study particular to the Colossian epistle.

In a discussion such as this, several theses may be introduced in the course of the study. Each thesis will be presented objectively. However, along with an unprejudiced viewpoint of each thesis presented, there will be reasons given for its acception and rejection. The reason for the acceptance of a thesis by a scholar might be the same grounds by which other scholars reject that same thesis. By a discussion of such important problems included in this study of the Colossian epistle, and a review of these theories held by scholars regarding each position, this discussion enters into the critical field of study. The purpose of criticism is to examine and to publish the results of such examination, whether they be traditional or novel. The purpose of a critical study is to arrive at the truth. This discussion will undertake to present an objective discussion of the most important critical theories relating to the Colossian letter.

Because this discussion is an objective study considering only some of the major critical problems of the epistle, it will be limited. Some problems in relation to Colossians loom larger on the horizon of study than others. Only the major problems will be discussed in this study, and these not exhaustively. An attempt

will be made to present the thinking of the most noted scholars who have treated each subject that will be discussed. In the discussion, only the selected problems regarding this piece of early Christian literature will be given consideration.

A better way to understand literature is to understand the historic background in which it found its existence. The first chapter in this study will be devoted to geographical and historical conditions of Colossae. This will be undertaken with the purpose to better understand the environment and problems confronting Christianity as it entered into the district of Colossae. Then too, this chapter will serve as a background for the remaining chapters. Not only will the city of Colossae be included in the first chapter, but the neighboring district will be considered as a part of this study, especially the towns of Laodicea and Hieropolis. These two towns, especially, play a predominant role in the history of Colossae. Not only will this chapter serve as a basic study for the setting of Colossians, but it will also form a framework for the problems which will be discussed in the following chapters.

The second chapter will be devoted to the study of the authorship of Colossians and the date of writing the epistle. Historical and traditional theories regarding the authorship of the epistle will first be presented. The writing of Colossians also involves other particular Pauline let-

ters, especially Ephesians. Since Colossians is usually regarded as one of the prison epistles, any bearing on the authorship of Colossians with regards to this group of letters will also be given consideration. Since the epistle to the Laodiceans also has a bearing on the authorship of Colossians, a special discussion of it is found in the appendix. The various views of authorship of Colossians also will be noted. Finally, a discussion as to the possible places of authorship will be given, with some reasons of acceptance and rejection of each theory. The probability of an acceptance of one theory will be more evident because a list of the most prominent scholars treating the problem of authorship will be given with each place discussed.

The third chapter will discuss the reason for the writing of Colossians. Evidently there was a purpose involved in the writing of this letter, and the writer had some purpose in mind for employing the language used in its contents. The third chapter discusses the reasons for the writing of Colossians, and also conditions existing in the church at Colossae which prompted the writing. There are various theories as to the identification of the errorists at work in Colossae. A review of these theories will be presented along with a list of the most noted scholars advocating each theory. Reasons for advocating their theory will also be given, along with some reasons why various other scholars reject it and accept another. By doing this, the study will re-

main within the bounds of the objective intention, and yet will present the most prominent critical theories presented in the authorship of Colossians.

The last chapter is devoted to a study of the analysis and contents of the epistle. The purpose of this chapter is not so much of a commentary nature, but to explain the main trend of thought of the epistle in the light of the foregoing studies. In a discussion on the contents of the epistle every word will not be given special treatment, nor every phrase exegetically analyzed. An examination into the reason why a thing is said will be of more importance in this study than an intricate presentation and diagnosis of every word occurring in the work. However, when necessary, a thorough investigation into words and phrases will not be neglected. Different theories will be presented on the interpretation of select passages involving critical problems. This will show how scholars, who differ in the theories of authorship and the identification of the errorists, give exposition of the vital passages involving these critical problems. Following the last chapter there will be a short conclusion which will summarize the results of the study, and which will discuss the relevance of the epistle to present day Christianity.

Before entering into the body of discussion as outlined above, it is fitting to give some of the expectancies included in this study. In the first place, the main objec-

tive in this study is to understand more thoroughly this particular piece of Christian literature. To do this, it is necessary to investigate the field of scholarship which has given special treatment to this epistle. Thus the second hope of this study is to become acquainted with the thinking of scholars on this subject, and to be able to know the thoughts of the best scholars on the various problems encountered in a study such as this. The final hope of writing is that the results of this investigation will not stop with cold scholarship, but that it will have an impact on life; if not any more than to discipline the writer.

And so, realizing the significance of such a study about to be undertaken, and too, realizing the vastness of the subject, the plan of study as outlined will be undertaken. It is hoped that the intended aims will be partially reached when the conclusions are drawn. Ever keeping in mind that this is not an exhaustive treatment of Colossians, and that each chapter will have its limitations, we will proceed with the discussion.



## CHAPTER I

### THE CHURCH OF COLOSSAE

The once proud and thriving Lycus Valley is today a shambled mass of stones. However, in the time of the apostle Paul it represented a section of the economic wealth of Asia. This section of Asia Minor was once popular for a variety of activities. It was outstanding as a health resort. The woolen goods from the Lycus Valley were unsurpassed. Medicinal eye ointment was here manufactured and dispensed to the ends of the continent. Vacationists were lured by the calcareous limestone falls of Hieropolis. Laodicea was an outstanding political point in relation to Rome. The Lycus Valley represented the crossroads of trade which united the East and West of the Roman Empire. The Lycus Valley was the valley of many voices, religions included.

It is not surprising that Christianity found a reception and was established as a religion among the people of the Lycus Valley. Christianity, in the time of Paul, was a religion which followed the highway. It followed the masses. However, there was a small town in the Lycus Valley to which Paul addressed an epistle. This town was Colossae. Unimportant as it was in the days of Paul, it deserves notice due to the New Testament letter addressed to the church meeting in that place. Outranked in importance by its neighbors, Laodicea and Hieropolis, it has become more renowned than either of them.

It is to this town, especially, that ones attention is drawn upon engaging a study of the Colossian Epistle. It is a ghost town that has been imaginatively animated because of a few pages in the New Testament.

However, since Colossae was of little importance as to size and influence at the time of Paul's writing, its neighboring towns of greater importance must be studied along with it. No doubt, Laodicea and Hieropolis influenced Colossae to a great extent after it had waned from its distinction in comparison to these two surrounding points. For that reason, in studying the church at Colossae, the whole Lycus Valley must be taken into consideration. Colossae was only a part of the valley, and the knowledge of this small town should be related to the whole of its environment in order to appreciate the finer points of the early Christianity established there. Then too, it is important that the whole Lycus Valley is taken into consideration, for the Colossian Epistle mentions Hieropolis and Laodicea.<sup>1</sup> Evidently the churches in these three towns bore an affinity with one another. If this be the case, by studying Colossae in relation to its environment more of the letter can be understood in terms of its historical background.

Most of the territory under discussion was located in the Asian province which included Phrygia Asia. This province of Asia must not be confused with the continent as we think of

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 4:13.

it today. Asia was the Roman province which included the Western parts of the peninsula now called Asia Minor. Included in it were the countries of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, the greater part of Phrygia, the Gorian, Konian and Aeolion coast cities, the Troad and some islands off the coast. Asia was formed into a province when Attalus III bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133 B. C. Ephesus was usually thought of as the great city of the province. At least Ephesus was the housing city of the great provincial officials.<sup>1</sup>

The country of Phrygia was included in the province of Asia. Phrygia means the land of the Phryges. The Phryges are said to have come from Western Thrace gradually spreading their territory by conquest. In fact, their sea power enabled them to hold such marks as Troy and Lydia about 900 B. C. However, during Greek rule the country of Phrygia was divided and redivided until there were districts and sections here and there.

Until Alexander the Great took over Phrygia, the country was dominated by an Oriental spirit. The Seleucid kings and then the Pergamenian kings founded settlements in Phrygia, one to offset the other. We have no real clue as to the exact character of the colonists. Prior to Greek domination, the priests of the great religious centers were the government officials and landowners. Gradually the land passed into the hands of the aristocracy of the Greeks, then

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<sup>1</sup>W. Ramsey, "Asia," Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. I, (1905).

Romans.

Ramsey begins his description of the country in Roman times by saying:

In the Roman time Phrygia was divided between two provinces, Asia and Galatia, with thorough Roman indifference to national affairs in mapping out their province - an indifference which resulted in a final failure of these provincial divisions to attain permanence.<sup>1</sup>

Galatian Phrygia was a strip of territory extending along the front of the Prsidian mountains. Asian Phrygia was much larger, being the major portion of the country. However, it too was relieved of possessions until it became a small territory. At the time of Roman rule Phrygia was classified as High Phrygia and Low Phrygia. Low Phrygia included Hieropolis, and towns less elevated in relation to sea level. High Phrygia was the elevated region of Central Phrygia which was between the Sangarios on the north-east and the great highway passing close to Hieropolis in the Lycus Valley.<sup>2</sup> Phrygia was a ripple of mountains and valleys which makes precise description out of the question. However, there is only one valley which should be given attention; for in it rested the city of Colossae. It is the Lycus Valley.

Since there are no letters written to either Laodicea and Hierapolis, and since the churches in this town were closely related to the one at Colossae, it is possible that some general

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<sup>1</sup>W. Ramsey, "Phrygia," Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. III, (1906).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

conclusions can be drawn about all three points of interest.

Moule gives a general location of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea by the following:

These towns lay in the great peninsula now called Asia Minor, in a district where Lydia and Phrygia touched and as it were overlapped each other, and which was included by the Romans in a department of proconsular Asia called the Cilycatic Union. The sites are found about 110 miles east of that of Ephesus, near the 38th parallel of north latitude and midway between the 29th and 30th parallels of east (Greenwich) longitude, in a minor valley of the system of the river, Maenander, now called the Mendre.<sup>1</sup>

The Lycus Valley was accessible by means of a natural pass which opened Phrygia to the outside world. This pass Ramsay calls, "The Gate of Phrygia."<sup>2</sup> Ramsay elaborately describes the pass and the scenery which is encountered from the time one enters the pass until one reaches the beautiful Lycus Valley.<sup>3</sup> The striking characteristic of the region is its shelves, naturally carved into the mountains, and its rivers which have cut deep canyon like gorges through the hills. Radford describes such scenes by these brief remarks:

Less than a hundred miles south-east of Ephesus the valley of the Meander narrows into a pass, the open gate through which Greek civilization and Roman imperialism travelled eastwards and the trade of Phrygia flowed westwards to the Aegean seaboard. Fifteen miles farther east the Euphrates leaves the Meander at its sharp bend from its southward course,

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<sup>1</sup>H. Moule, Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>W. Ramsay, The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and strikes south-east along its tributary the Lycus. Ten miles further east, less than ten miles to the north of the highway, lies the city of Hierapolis, and on the highway itself lies Laodicea, to the south of the river. Both cities were situated on the terraces of the hills that form the north and south walls of the once more widening valley. Twelve miles east of Laodicea, in a little glen which forms the higher shelf of the Lycus Valley, lies the site of Colossae, with the Lycus running through its midst in a deep ravine.<sup>1</sup>

The valley is about forty miles in length. The valley lay in the midst of a volcanic region which was visited many times by earthquakes. Everyone of the cities of the valley was subject to these volcanic conditions. In fact,

Less than thirty miles north of the valley of the Lycus is a vast district, anciently called Catacaemen, Burnt-up Land; it still presents a scene of blackened desolation, as after a recent eruption of volcanos.<sup>2</sup>

The Lycus Valley was a valley of rivers. The two most important are the Lycus and Meander. Moule traces the course of both in the subsequent quotation:

The Lycus ("Wolf"), now the Tchouk Su, rising in the south-east, flows westward through this valley into the larger valley of the Maeander, and passes not long before the waters meet, Colossae and Laodicea on its left, and Hierapolis, opposite Laodicea, on its right. A space of less than twelve miles divides Colossae from the other two sides, which are about six miles distant each other; thus the three places are easily accessible in one day's walk.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the fertility of the valley offered by the rivers, sheep raising was the chief occupation. The wool was of rare excellence. It was noted throughout the empire. The

<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, The Epistle to the Colossians and the Epistle to Philemon. (London: Methuen and Co., 1931), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>H. Moule, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

rivers carried deposits of minerals which provided materials to dye the wool. In fact, the dye was rated above that which came from Thyatira. A rich purple dye that came from Colossae was known as colossinus.

Three races composed the nationality of the Lycus Valley. They were the Phrygians, Carians and Lydians.<sup>1</sup> Colossae was Phrygian. Laodicea was both Phrygian and Carian. Hierapolis was a mixture of Lydians and Carians. The Phrygians and Carians tended to be of a patriarchal type, while the Lydians were more of a matriarchal type. The god of the Phrygians and Carians tended to resemble the Greek Zeus, who was the king of gods and men. The Lydians worshipped Apollo. It is noted by Ramsay that the worship of the god Apollo, the son, was accompanied by the worship of Leto, the mother.<sup>2</sup>

The Carians and Phrygians were warriors and conquerors. The Lydians were a mild mannered and retreating type of people. When these races were settled quietly in the Lycus Valley the Carian and Phrygian emphasized the superiority of the male in all activity, while the Lydians admired and cultivated female traits. This Ramsay points out:

Hence the Father-God Papas, the Thundering God

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 9.

Bronton, the Charioteer Benneus, and various other male forms, are more prominent in the Phrygian and Carian religion; while in the Lydian religion more stress is laid on the Mother Goddess, and the God appears more markedly as her Son.<sup>1</sup>

In the Lycus Valley all three races are united in the Lydian Hierapolis, the Phrygian Colossae and the Carian Attouda. Greek gradually became the spoken language of this territory and helped fuse these races into a common group of people. Although there was a mixture of Oriental, European, Asiatic and Greek cultures; these forces were finally broken down and at the time of Roman rule there was somewhat of a solidarity of thought among these peoples.

The most important city in the Lycus Valley was Laodicea. It outranked its neighbor, Hierapolis, and completely overshadowed Colossae. The city was founded by Antiochus II (261-246 B. C.), and named after his wife Laodice.<sup>2</sup> The earlier names for the city were Diospolis and Rhoas. There is some conjecture as to whether these two older names designated the same site as the original Laodicea did.<sup>3</sup> In earlier times the city was outranked by Colossae, and did not share the importance it possessed in later history. As Ramsay states: "Of its history under the Greek kings hardly anything is known; but it was apparently far from being a great city."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 35.



Even when the Roman rule began it was a small city.

However, the city prospered until it became one of the richest of Asia. John refers to it in Revelation as a self sufficing city in need of nothing.<sup>1</sup> One of the many earthquakes occurred in the vicinity of Laodicea in 60 A. D., which shook the city severely. Its inhabitants refused Roman aid, being in a position to quickly restore the damage as fast as it could be rebuilt. The city became a center of banking, and was noted for its wealthy inhabitants. Ramsay reviews the important Zenonid family who lived in Laodicea, and who bequeathed financial gifts to the city. From this family in its succeeding generations came some of the most distinguished personalities of the entire region, if not the entire Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The manufacture of woolen materials was the leading industry of Laodicea, and was the first cause of her prosperity. The wool was sheared from glossy back sheep peculiar to that district. From the city was shipped many of the finest woolen garments in the world. It led in woolen exports.

The religion of the city was varied because the population was composed of many elements. There were colonists from Macedonia. A Syrian element was probably present due to the mention of the Semetic god Aseis, who was absorbed by the

<sup>1</sup>Revelation 3:17.

<sup>2</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 42f.

native god Zeus. Then too, there was a Jewish colony which was constantly enlarged by immigrations.<sup>1</sup>

Radford informs us of the religious life of the city by this analysis:

Of the religious life of Laodicea there is little distinctive evidence. Between the city and the 'gate of Phrygia' to the west there was the famous temple of MenCarou, the Carian form of the old Phrygian deity, variously identified or associated with Zeus or Apollo and Asklepios by the Hellenic immigrants. Round this cult grew a famous school of medicine, which had its seat in Laodicea itself.<sup>2</sup>

Laodicea became involved in emperor worship, since it was of political interest to the Roman Empire. The city was subject to many kinds of curious feats, being open to all religions. Any cult of importance here found rich soil for development. Most religions which were established in this city were internally corrupted by vice and immorality. Many religions came into the city by the great highway, but soon found that the highway was built for prosperity and not for religion. The following briefly traces this highway in relation to Laodicea:

A great trade route from the Euphrates and the interior passed to it through Apamea. There it forked, one branch going to the Meander valley to Magnesia and thence north to Ephesus, a distance of about 90 miles; and the other branch crossing the mountains by the easy pass to Philadelphia and

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<sup>1</sup>C. Erdman, The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1933), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 34.

the Hermas valley, Sardis, Thyatira and at last Pergamum.<sup>1</sup>

Laodicea was prominent after the days of Paul. Apparently it emerged from its spiritual apathy, for we read of one of its bishops in the second century, Saragis, being martyred for the faith. Later on, the city became the center for the Paschal controversy. The Council of Laodicea, held about 365 A. D. issued, among the many edicts, warnings concerning Jewish regulations and angel worship. These may have a bearing on the earlier problems faced by Paul in that region. Today, however, there is but little trace of this once proud city of Phrygia. There are a few remains which help one visualize the city of old, but the once prosperous and proud metropolis of Phrygia lies shattered in the dust.

On the north of the valley, opposite to the hills of Laodicea, was a broad level terrace jutting out from the mountain side and looking out to the plain. On this terrace was located the neighboring city of Hierapolis. Although Hierapolis was not as important as Laodicea, it has a more fascinating background. This city has been termed the fairest of all Asia, the city of gold.<sup>2</sup> Hayes endeavors to describe its grandeur by this brief epitome:

It was a city set on a hill. Beautiful for situation, on a broad terrace with an outlook to the south and the east and the west, it was famed for the

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<sup>1</sup>"Laodicea," Encyclopedia Britanica, Vol. XVI, 11th ed., (1910).

<sup>2</sup>C. Erdman, op. cit., p. 11.

purity of its air and the healthfulness of its waters and the natural beauties on every side. The cliff on which it stood was one of the natural wonders of the ancient world.<sup>1</sup>

Hierapolis was noted as a pleasure spot, a health resort and a religious shrine. Ramsay locates it thus:

Facing Laodicea at a distance of six miles to the north was the 'Holy City,' Hiera Poles, situated on a shelf, about 1,100 feet above the sea and 150-300 above the plain, close under the mountains that bound the Lycus valley on the north-east; and twelve miles north-west of Hierapolis, on the west bank of the Meander, three miles above its junction with the Lycus, was Tripolis, founded by the Pergamenian kings to counterbalance the Seleucid proclivities of Laodicea.<sup>2</sup>

Hierapolis was one of the ancient wonders of the world, for over its cliffs poured tons of limestone water which deposited the white calcareous mineral in stalactite fashion. This was a lure for travellers on the great highway. Its location provided an ideal spot for a health resort. The health resort was found there due to the location of the city, the mineral springs and the religious activities connected with the bubbling spring.

The bubbling spring, commonly called the Plutonium, was a hot well from which came a mephitic vapor which immediately killed those who stood over it and exhaled its fumes. The mutilated priests of Cybele were to have possessed a divine immunity to it. Even the birds flying over it were exposed to its harm. It is reported that often birds

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<sup>1</sup>D. A. Hayes, The New Testament Epistle, (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1921), p. 352.

<sup>2</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 84.

were killed in its deadly fumes.<sup>1</sup>

The Antolian religion found a following in Hieropolis. It was a nature religion, which taught that even though life was subject to death it would reappear in a different form, yet not the same. There is a unity in life, yet a complex diversity which caused many to become completely lost in a divine rapture. Accompanying this belief there was recognition given to their city protectorate, Mother Leto. She was a god of nature, being responsible for all vegetation. Artemis was the daughter of Leto who took the latter's place, and who represented the reappearance of the mother god in a continuous, yet different form. This type of religion is patterned after the Eleusinian Mysteries. They, together with Oriental speculation, were rationalized and given the name Phrygian Mysteries.<sup>2</sup>

Apollo, the son of Leto, was the teacher of the mysteries to the worshippers. There was formed a city brotherhood which had a common treasury, which not only supported their activities, but also was used by worshippers of other cities, who held similar views. Since the patron god, Apollo Archegetes, was one of both health and pleasure, the city was devoted to the pursuit of these two principles. It is quite interesting to note the extremes in the religions of Colossae;

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (8th ed. rev.), (New York: Macmillan Co., 1886), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 92.

that of self abasement and of indulgent pleasure. Radford states this is due to the differences in the Hellenic and Phrygian religions which seemed to be at opposite poles. There were the educated who indulged in the degrading activities of the Phrygian rites, as well as the uneducated and naive type of citizen. In time the more cultural practices of higher values found their permanent place among the society.<sup>1</sup>

In the filth of Hieropolis arose Epictetus, the greatest moral philosopher of the heathen world. He probably lived in Hieropolis in the time of Paul. We have no definite proof as to whether this intellectual giant of morality ever conversed with the unmatched Christian, Paul. Many would like to believe so. Tradition affirms that this city did see some notable Christian personalities within its city walls. John the Apostle is said to have frequented the city from Ephesus. Andrew and Philip, also apostles, along with two personal disciples of Christ, Aristion and John the Presbyter, were its noted guests. In fact, Philip is said to have made his home at Hieropolis with his three daughters, two of whom related information to Papias concerning accounts of the first preaching of Christianity. Philip and two of his daughters were buried in the city. Papias became bishop of the city during the second century. His Expositions of Oracles of the Lord won wide acclaim for the bishop. Following the life of

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 36.

Papias Christianity remained active in Hieropolis. Moule sketches these happenings in this way:

Papias was succeeded in his pastorate, probably by Abercius, or Avircius, and he by Claudius Apollinaris, (St. Apollinaris), about A. D. 180; an active and important writer, author of an Apology: or defense of Christianity, of discussions of paganism and Judaism, of a book on the Paschal controversy, and of others on that raised by Montanus, and his claim to a special inspiration, and his revolt against too formal ecclesiasticism. Apollinaris gathered at Hieropolis, a council, which excommunicated Montanus and his associate Maximilla.<sup>1</sup>

However, after Apollinaris there seems to be a lull in the importance of any activity there, for any names of importance are not connected with the city. There were a few councils held there, but the city never was fully revived to its original role in Christianity.

The city which interests this study most, yet which yields the least information concerning itself, is Colossae. It was a shrinking and insignificant town in the days of Paul. This is why we must depend largely on the information given of its neighbors, Laodicea and Hieropolis. It was about ten miles from Laodicea and thirteen miles from Hieropolis. At one time Colossae was an important city. Moule notes that,

Here Xerxes host (B. C. 481) halted on its march to Thermopylae and Plataea; and Herodotus (vii. 30) takes occasion to call it 'a large city of Phrygia, in which (the phrase is remarkable)' the Lycus disappears in a subterranean gulph, and reappearing about five stadia further down, so flows into the Meander.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. Moule, op. cit., p. 17f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

Cyrus, with ten thousand of his mercenaries, stayed a week there.

Ramsay, to whom most scholars refer as the authority, locates the city in this way:

Colossae occupied a sloping slen in the upper Lycus, from which M. Kadmos rises so steep that it seems almost to overhang the level bottom of the glen. On the north broken hilly ground forms the transition from the level valley to the mountain side of the plateau. The part of the plateau which presses from the north on the upper end of the Lycus valley is the Baklan-Ova, the territory of ancient Lounda. The highest point in the ridge bounds the plateau; forming a continuation of the Mossyna mountains, is now called Belevi-Dagh. The main road that connects the Lycus valley with the Baklan-Ova passes north of it after crossing the hilly ground on the west; but a shorter path ascends sharply from the eastern end of the glen northwards by Ala-Kurt to Denizler. Nearly at the same point another path leads earthward by the easy pass of Graos-Gala to the plain of Sumos, with its salt lake, one of the lowest parts of the central plateau: this was the line of the great Eastern Highway.<sup>1</sup>

History does not reveal how the city acquired its name. There is a possibility that it received its name from the Kolow Lake, which was located near Sardis. The city was Phrygian in thought and tended to possess the characteristics of its superior city, Laodicea. Colossae manufactured woolen articles and was famous for its purple dye. Evidently, the city did supply Laodicea with exports. Being off the main road, it probably did not have direct commercial relations as did Laodicea.

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<sup>1</sup>W. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," op. cit., p. 208.



As for religion, Colossae was the home of the worship of Cybele, Sabazius and the Ephesian Artemis.<sup>1</sup> Cybele was the mother deity of the Phrygians. As in most Phrygian religions, the worship of Cybele was concerned with nature. The best illustration which can be given of it is found in a description of the growth of trees. The leaves die, yet the tree lives. The leaves come again, though different, yet the tree has one continuous life. Showerman relates this important note concerning the festival of this religion:

A celebration corresponding to the annual spring festival at Rome, which extended over the period March 15-27, thus including the equinox, consisted in a kind of sacred drama of Cybele and Attis, and no doubt existed in Phrygia also.<sup>2</sup>

The Colossian population being a mixture of Phrygians, Orientals, Hellenists and Jews offered quite a situation for the development of a ripe heresy in the time of Paul.

Colossae waned in importance until the seventh century, when it was deserted for the town of Chonae, about three miles to the south. About the only remnant, even in memory of Colossae, was the great church erected there in honor of St. Michael. For a subsequent history of the city we refer to Banks in this quotation:

During the 7th and 8th cents. the place was overrun by the Saracens, in the 12th cent. the church

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<sup>1</sup>T. K. Abbott, The International and Critical Commentary - A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1905), p. XLIX.

<sup>2</sup>G. Showerman, "Cybele," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. IV, (1922).

was destroyed by the Turks and the city disappeared. Its site was explored by Mr. Hamilton. The ruins of the church, the stone foundation of the large theatre, and a nicropolis with stones of a peculiar shape are still to be seen. During the Middle Ages the place was the name of Chonae; it is now called Chanos.<sup>1</sup>

Having given a brief description of the territory involving the Colossian Epistle as a background for study, attention must now be given to the establishment of Christianity and the development of the church, especially in Colossae. Here again, there is no definite information, but only reasonings and probabilities. The probability that Paul never visited the Lycus Valley, at least Colossae, prior to the writing of the epistle is brought out by the phrase, "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh."<sup>2</sup>

Evidently these people in the Lycus Valley had learned of Christ through Epaphras. This is substantiated by the phrase, "even as ye learned of Epaphras."<sup>3</sup> Moffatt contends that Paul neither founded nor visited the place.<sup>4</sup> Enslin thinks the church was founded by Epaphras.<sup>5</sup> There is overwhelming agreement that Paul did not personally enter into the work at Colossae. He mentions his work among them as

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<sup>1</sup>J. Banks, "Colossae," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. J. Orr, Vol. II, (1937)

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:1.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:7.

<sup>4</sup>J. Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup>M. S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 291.

praying for them.<sup>1</sup> Goodspeed believes the church was founded through the influence of Paul's work at Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> The notion that Paul may have stayed at Philemon's estate, the church not being started; or that Paul did not have the opportunity to meet with them, is not likely. In the first place, he probably would have written something about it. In the second place, he would not disregard meeting with the church.

There are two passages in Acts which give mention of Paul going through Phrygia.<sup>3</sup> In his second journey Paul travelled as far as Lystra where he found Timothy. The important phrase is this: "and they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."<sup>4</sup> The region where Paul journeyed was probably Phrygia in Galatia, rather than Phrygia in Asia. By travelling through Mysia he neglected the Lycus Valley. Abbott aptly disposes the possibility of Paul's visiting Colossae either on the second or third journey. As for the second journey, Abbott contends that by going through Mysia he kept to the east of the valley of the Lycus. Of the third he says:

On his third journey, he founded no new churches on Asia Minor, but confined himself to revisiting and confirming those already founded (Acts xviii:23). From the Galatic and Phrygian region he proceeded to Ephesus by a higher lying and more direct route, not the regular trade route down the valley of the

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:3,4.

<sup>2</sup>E. Goodspeed, An Introduction to the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 16:6; 18:23.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 16:16.

Lycus and the Maeander. On this Lightfoot and Ramsay are agreed, the former, however, thinking Paul might have gone as far north as Pessinus before leaving Galatia; the latter (consistently with his view of the meaning of 'Galatian' in Acts) supposing him to have gone directly westward from Antioch to Ephesus.<sup>1</sup>

By this reasoning, along with the statements in the epistle, it is not likely that Paul had visited the city. Then how did Christianity come to Colossae, and who was the pioneer of the church there? Buell states the answers to the question, as most scholars answer it, in the following manner:

It was rather through his two years reasoning in the school of Tyrannus that 'all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.' (Acts 19:9f). Epaphras, finding his way from Colossae (Col. 4:12) to the provincial capital, became Paul's 'fellow servant and faithful minister of Christ on his behalf' to the towns of the Lycus (Col. 1:5-7; 4:12f.) and the founder of the churches in Colossae, Laodicea and Hieropolis. Two other Colossians, Philemon and Archippus, are named fellow workers and the latter is exhorted to fulfil his 'ministry received from the Lord.' (Philemon 2) and another in that of Nymphos in Laodicea (Col. 4:15).<sup>2</sup>

Radford reasons that Ephesus was the city to which Paul had purposed himself, and that he probably did not intend to detour in his journey to the great metropolis. He could reach more cities indirectly in Ephesus than he could by trying to reach all of them by a personal appearance.

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<sup>1</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. xlvihi.

<sup>2</sup>M. D. Buell, "Colossians, Epistle to" The Encyclopedia Americana, (Vol. 7 (1949)).

By staying at Ephesus, Paul could talk to travellers from the many cities of all Asia. From this point, he could send ministers into surrounding towns and thus supervise the work of many places, yet tend to his ministry at Ephesus. It seems logical and conclusive to regard this as the case.

It was probably during Paul's stay at Ephesus that the Church was inaugurated at Colossae. Epaphras, being a native of Colossae, took back the news of the gospel to that unimportant place. He, along with other interested people, one of them being Philemon, began church in the latter's home. We would like to think that Philemon visited Paul in Ephesus, along with Epaphras. Not only is it likely that Epaphras was the instigator of the church at Colossae, but in addition he probably was also the district evangelist for the churches of the Lycus Valley.<sup>1</sup> At least, he had a knowledge of the intricacies of the churches in these cities and knew of their activities and problems. The evangelistic career of Epaphras probably began shortly after his conversion to Christianity at Ephesus. Thus the work at Colossae was Paul's work in that he was responsible for its establishment and teaching; yet he was not personally related to the group there. Nevertheless, Paul felt a kinship to the people in Colossae, as well as those in Laodicea and Hieropolis. He desired to fill his capacity of adviser and apostle. Epaphras must have learned

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<sup>1</sup>G. Milligan, "Epaphras" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. I (1901).

of Christ from Paul, else he would not have taken this delicate church problem to him. It was from the dean of gospel preachers that advice came to the Colossians. Timothy is mentioned in the salutation of the epistle. Whether Timothy had any direct relation to the church cannot be known. From the account in Acts it is not likely that Timothy entered into the work there. If he did, it was only for a brief interval.<sup>1</sup>

There are other names appearing in the Colossian Epistle besides those of Epaphras and Timothy. Probably the next in importance is that of Philemon.<sup>2</sup> We know little of Philemon, except that he was one of the leaders in the church at Colossae. Philemon was rich, but along with it he was hospitable. His name occurs in inscriptions, and is found twice in literature in connection with Phrygia. He is said to have been martyred by being stoned in company with Apphia, Archippus and Onesimus during the reign of Nero.

From the epistle addressed to Philemon it is suspected that it and the Colossian letter may have been sent simultaneously. Even though the purpose of this chapter has no bearing on the relation of the two epistles, much is learned of Onesimus from the Philemon epistle which is not gleaned in the pages of the Colossian letter, although Onesimus is men-

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 19:22.

<sup>2</sup>J. H. Bernard, "Philemon" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. III (1906).

tioned in the latter.<sup>1</sup> Onesimus, a runaway slave who fled to Paul, evidently contacted the apostle who was in prison and relayed to him the story of his experience. Paul intends to send him back to Philemon with Tychicus, who is to bear the letter and information concerning Paul's predicament.<sup>2</sup> Since Onesimus was a common name in Phrygia, especially for slaves, tradition is confused in relating his later life. W. Lock, who sketches his life, says he later became a prominent member in the Colossian church.<sup>3</sup>

Along with Onesimus came Tychicus, a native of Asia. There are several reasons why Tychicus was sent by Paul. He probably knew the district, and was familiar with the type of people living there. As Lightfoot points out, Tychicus came with the letters which Paul had written to the churches at Colossae and Laodicea.<sup>4</sup> Then too, he was bringing back Onesimus, the runaway slave, to his master. Onesimus was well thought of by Paul, and the apostle wanted the slave to arrive safely home without harm. These two friends of Paul were responsible for carrying the letter to Colossae, and no doubt, the one to Laodicea.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, Tychicus was to look into the affairs at Colossae and discover the trouble which brewed in their midst, for Paul says that his fellow laborer

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 4:9.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 4:7-9.

<sup>3</sup>W. Lock, "Onesimus" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. III (1906).

<sup>4</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>5</sup>H. A. Redpath, "Tychicus" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. IV (1905).

will come to relay information of the apostle and to encourage their hearts.<sup>1</sup> Even though Epaphras was the minister of the church, he remained with Paul. Whether he was also a prisoner with Paul, or whether the apostle felt a greater need for him remains to be seen. Epaphras carried the news to Paul of the trouble in the church, but Paul deemed it best that the evangelist stay with him. We are left without reason for this. It may have been that Epaphras was also a fellow prisoner, as was Aristarchus, and could not return. Then too, if Epaphras could have settled the trouble he would not have appealed to Paul for aid. It may have been best if Epaphras did not return immediately, even if he were able.

There remain a few other workers with Paul who were of interest in some way with the Colossian church. Aristarchus is mentioned.<sup>2</sup> He was a native of Thessalonica, and was first introduced as one of Paul's workers in Ephesus. Whether he ever visited Colossae we do not know. He probably did have contact with some of its members who came to Ephesus to visit Paul. At least, he seems to have been intimate with Epaphras from what Muir says:

It has been suggested that he shared St. Paul's imprisonment voluntarily, and that he and Epaphras (cf. Col. 4:10, Philem. 23) may have participated in the apostle's bonds alternately.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 4:8.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 4:10.

<sup>3</sup>W. Muir, "Aristarchus" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. I (1905).



Along with Aristarchus, Mark, the cousin of Barnabas is mentioned.<sup>1</sup> What the instructions were which the church at Colossae were to receive from Mark is not known. The supposition is that these instructions had come from Paul, or possibly Epaphras. They probably were preparatory to a mission of Mark to the churches of Asia, or the Lycus Valley, to which Paul heartily endorses and gives his commendation.<sup>2</sup> Along with Mark, Justus is named.<sup>3</sup> No doubt, he was one of the inner circle, but where he came from is a mystery to the modern reader. He may have been a Jew in the Lycus Valley, but this is pure conjecture. Tradition makes him, in later years, a bishop of Eleutheropolis in Palestine. Paul notes the fact that Aristarchus, Mark and Justus are the only men of the circumcision with him. Since Aristarchus is a Greek name, it is probable that he was a proselyte. If so, he could have come from the Jewish Colony of the Lycus along with Justus. It is best not to become too involved in speculation though, for there are not any facts which warrant this postulate.

Luke and Demas are mentioned.<sup>4</sup> How they fit into the work at Colossae, if they do, is not known. It is in Colossians that we glean the important information that Luke was a physician. Being so close to Paul, the apostle did not want

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 4:10.

<sup>2</sup> L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 4:11.

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 4:14.

to slight his name in the letter; and the mention of him may have encouraged the readers and informed them of Luke's whereabouts. Demas, from Thessalonica, later on left Paul, loving home, occupation or status better than the rigorous hardships suffered as a companion of the apostle.

Evidently the church at Laodicea met at the house of Nympha.<sup>1</sup> It is altogether likely that Nymphas was a contraction of another name. Radford explains that, "an alternative accentuation of the Greek word would give Nympha, a woman's name."<sup>2</sup> This is not certain because of the possessive pronoun which differs in various manuscripts. We do not know exactly whether it was third person, masculine or feminine; or whether it was third person plural. Whatever the case may be, we are at least afforded the information that there was a church which convened in Laodicea; and which had varied communications with the church at Colossae.<sup>3</sup>

There is one more name which appears toward the end of the last chapter; that of Archippus.<sup>4</sup> From the letter to Philemon it would seem that Archippus had some close relationship to Philemon, but nothing is known of him for certain beyond his mention here and in Philemon. Lightfoot supposes him to be the son of Philemon.<sup>5</sup> Because his name so closely follows the greetings to the Laodicean church, Lightfoot thinks

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 4:15.      <sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 4:16.      <sup>4</sup>Colossians 4:17.

<sup>5</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 307.

that he resided in Laodicea. Lightfoot also argues for his point by noting that a copulative conjunction links his name with the remarks directed to the Laodicean church.<sup>1</sup> Dickson, on the other hand, believes Archippus to have resided at Colossae for he contends that Paul would not have gone about addressing him through a strange church. Paul was speaking directly to him, or at least conveying the message which was to be given as direct address.<sup>2</sup>

Outside of this information little more is known about the church at Colossae. It may be well to review some of the main facts concerning the church there before entering into further discussion. Colossae was an insignificant town in Asia Minor in which Paul had never set foot. Epaphras was responsible for the work in Colossae, being responsible to Paul for the belief and conduct of the people. Epaphras was converted in Ephesus during Paul's stay in the city along with Philemon and possibly others from the Lycus Valley. When Epaphras came to Paul explaining the problems of the church in Colossae, which involved heretical teachings, Paul wrote the church, feeling a responsibility to help them. More will be said in regards to the writing of the epistle, the false teaching in Colossae and the contents of the letter in the following chapters.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>W. Dickson, "Archippus" Dictionary of the Bible, ed. J. Hastings, Vol. I (1905).

It was our purpose in this chapter to introduce the body of the study. Although little is known of the background of the Colossian church, this chapter has endeavored to picture it as it was in the time of Paul. The remaining task is to deal with some of the major problems relating to the Colossian epistle and to explain the contents of the epistle in the light of the probable solutions to these problems.

## CHAPTER II

### AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the authorship of the epistle and to designate the place from whence it was written. In taking into account the authorship, the language, style and vocabulary of the epistle will be briefly noted; especially in relation to some of the other epistles of Paul. However, an intricate analysis of this epistle in relation to other epistles will not be given because it would involve a more detailed study of these letters. Since this study is limited to the Colossian letter, only adequate space will be given in noting its language in relation to some other of Paul's writings. A detailed analysis of the epistle will be given in the last chapter, and, therefore, only passages which directly enter into discussion on authorship will be taken into account in this chapter. Then too, a few scholars give a parallelism between Ephesians and Colossians; but it must be remembered that when this is done the scholar either has included both epistles in one commentary or else he has a special theory of authorship, other than Pauline, connected with the two epistles. It may also be noted that when a parallelism of this sort is undertaken, it usually belongs to the study of Ephesians. Therefore, only a brief account will be taken

into consideration to the parallelism of Ephesians and Colossians. In other words, only that which is relevant to Colossians will be taken into consideration. This attitude is not one which cuts corners short, nor is it one of ignoring the problems involved in authorship, but one which deals only with the most important problems regarding the authorship of the epistle.

Traditional evidence, dating from the second century, bears its weight toward Pauline authorship of Colossians. Abbott notes that there are few notations to this epistle prior to the time of Irenaeus. He gives a reason for this in the following: "Probably the true account is that, the epistle being so largely controversial, its use would be less familiar to those who had no concern with the heresies with which it deals."<sup>1</sup> Abbott also states that there was an early acceptance of the epistle as the work of Paul. At least, there does not seem to be any early evidence that the epistle was rejected nor does it seem that any great controversy was waged in regard to Pauline authorship of the letter.

As Irenaeus was the first to quote the epistle in the West so was Clement of Alexandria the first to note it in the East. Marcion, the heretical teacher in Rome about 140 A. D., included this epistle in his list of canonical books. Marcion's acceptance of the epistle is important, because his private canon implies the existence of a larger

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<sup>1</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. 1.

canon, and his acceptance of the epistle indicates a traditional attitude in all parts of Christendom.<sup>1</sup> Because of such heretical attacks on the early literature of Christianity, the church, out of necessity, was forced to crystallize a canon which would be considered as a norm so as to guard against corruption of their literature. Colossians found its place among the early canon and still does today. The Muratorian Canon mentions the epistle as written by Paul to one of the seven churches; the others being located in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia, Thessalonica and Rome. The number seven, as in the Apocalypse, was representative of the complete unity of the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

In the third century Tertullian and Origen quoted frequently from the epistle, occasionally referring to it by name. In the early half of the second century quotations from Colossians are to be found in the works of Ignatius, Polycarp, the Epistle of Barnabas and from Justin Martyr. These writers do not name the author of the epistle. The references to these authors do show the wide recognition of the epistle in earlier times. Radford briefly analyzes traditional information by the following suggestions:

Two things emerge from these evidences taken together, viz. (1) the existence of this epistle (without any mention of its author or destination) as a doctrinal authority or a formative influence not much more than fifty years after its traditional date. (2) the identity of this epistle with the epistle to the Colossians quoted expressly as Pauline.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 1.   <sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

The traditional acceptance of Colossians in its present form, as regards Pauline authorship, began to be questioned about a century ago. A short account of the history of this criticism is given in the succeeding statements:

Mayeroff (1830) was the first to reject it. The Tübingen school, including Hilgenfeld, treated it as a second century work. Ewald thought that Timothy wrote it after consultation with Paul. Holtzmann (1872), following a view indicated by Hitzig, recognized a Pauline nucleus, but regarded more than half the Epistle as non-Pauline. Von Soden (1885) reduced considerably the range of interpolation in a series of articles on Holtzmann's hypothesis, but has since recognized the whole Epistle as Pauline, with the exception of 1: 16b, 17, which he thinks may be a gloss, since it disturbs the symmetry.<sup>1</sup>

The objections to a Pauline authorship of the epistle is rejected on the grounds of its Gnosticism, which was historically a second century heresy; its lofty Christology; its unusual language; its touch of Gnostic authorship and its long and elaborated sentences.<sup>2</sup>

In the chapter dealing with the Colossian Heresy, it is shown that even if Gnosticism be postulated in the epistle it need not be dated a second century heresy. In fact, the Gnosticism which is indicated in Colossians may be regarded earlier than Christianity. Most scholars of today regard

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<sup>1</sup>A. S. Peake, "The Epistle To The Colossians" (The Expositors Greek Testament ed. W. R. Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), Vol. III, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, Paul and the Intellectuals (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1928), p. 27.



Gnosticism as an active tendency rather than a crystallized system; and when Gnosticism is inferred in this epistle, it is usually thought of in its incipient stages. Thus the objection of Pauline authorship on the grounds of a prevailing Gnosticism falls by the wayside due to the research of modern scholarship.

Pauline authorship is also denied due to the lofty Christology of the epistle, which was supposed to be a later doctrine. Some scholars, in reviewing other epistles they designated Pauline, could not find any trace of such an elaborate doctrine of Christ. Therefore, they regarded the doctrine as a later development thus placing the epistle out of the range of Paul's pen. Williams, among other things, notes a trace of such Christology in other Pauline epistles in the following:

No one doubts that the doctrinal statements are in some respects more advanced than those found in the four epistles (Rom., I and II Cor., Gal.) whose genuineness is accepted by practically all scholars, but the question is whether the statements peculiar to Colossians and Ephesians may not legitimately, and even probably, have been made by the same writer at a later stage in his life under different conditions.<sup>1</sup>

The Christological section is found in Colossians 1: 15-20. Radford points out that the crux of the argument rests in Christ's position to the universe. Three points are noted in this aspect of Christ's activity. He is the original

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. Williams, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: University Press, 1928), p. xliii.

creator of the universe, the present principle of its coherence, and the final goal of its progress. The first point was hinted earlier in Paul's writings in I Corinthians 8: 6. The second may be found to be true in I Corinthians 8: 6, also. The third is more difficult to explain, for it does not seem clear whether God or Christ is the final goal of all creation. It could easily be that God has desired to purpose all things in Christ. Therefore, all creation would be purposed by God but glorified in Christ. God will be supreme through his glory in Christ. The point at hand, however, is that Paul had once written something of the importance of Christ in the universe. Thus the Christology in Colossians is not foreign to Paul.<sup>1</sup> "He had now to examine the place of Christ with reference not only to man's salvation but to the material universe", Scott says, "and was forced back upon the doctrine which he had previously thought of as merely speculative."<sup>2</sup>

Paul answered these heretics in their own language yet in terms of Christ. It is not out of harmony with Paul's doctrine when we think of the place he always gives to Christ in his thought. For as Peake asserts:

And yet it is in such perfect harmony with Paul's own doctrine that it seems improbable that it can be

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>E. F. Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 12.

due to another hand; and more than improbable when we remember that no other early Christian writer known to us, with the partial exception of the author of I Peter, has been able to produce the Pauline doctrine, and more than Penelope's warriors could bend Odysseus' bow.<sup>1</sup>

It is not out of the ordinary that Paul should write in such splendid terms about Christ. For "we cannot conceive how Paul, the aged, the prisoner of the Lord, could have written more appropriately to meet the needs of Christians in Colossae who were seeking a higher truth and fuller life along lines that led away from the true sources of the most abundant life."<sup>2</sup>

Along with the objection to the Christological sections not being Pauline, there is an objection that the doctrine of reconciliation in Colossians is further advanced than that of Paul. In Colossians 1: 20 the cross not only reconciles mankind, but also the angels, the universe and all things. However, we find germs of this type of thought in II Corinthians 5: 19 and Galatians 3: 19, also in I Corinthians 2: 6-8. The later tenor of Colossians fits so well into Paul's sequence of thought, and explains more thoroughly his earlier mention of Christ, the cross and the church, that there is little doubt any other writer could clarify these earlier inklings of such doctrines other than Paul himself.

<sup>1</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 489.

<sup>2</sup>H. T. Fowler, op. cit., p. 242.

Enslin lends additional information to the discussion by these subsequent remarks:

Such designations of Christ as "the firstborn of all creation" (1: 15) the one "through whom and unto whom all things have been created" (1: 16) "the head of the body, the church" (1: 18) - in the "so called" earlier epistles Christ is the sum total of Christians: they make up his body - the statement that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9); the striking and unparalleled mention of him as having made "peace through the blood of the cross" (1:20) - these are not found in the other letters, and may frankly be admitted to constitute a direct advance. But it must be remembered that Paul is striving to meet the errorists on their own ground. It is Christ, not God, who is being threatened. Thus it is perfectly natural to find Paul stressing so elaborately - even extrayagantly - Christ's complete adequacy and supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

Paul had probably been thinking of many great Christian doctrines, yet his conclusions had been separate and unseptematyed.<sup>2</sup> He had not formally presented these doctrines because there was no need to do so. Williams explains how Paul writes:

He never shows, that is to say, any desire to make a doctrinal system of Christianity just because he takes pleasure in thinking out the interrelation of various truths. On the contrary, it was, in every case of which we have cognisance, the practical difficulties in which his correspondents found themselves that drew out from him his doctrinal statements.<sup>3</sup>

Paul always answered his opponents in terms of Christ. Christ was the fulfillment of the law to his Jewish opponents. Christ was the fulfillment of philosophy to the

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<sup>1</sup>M. S. Enslin, op. cit., p. 291.

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., Li.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Colossian false teacher. And so:

Then came the news of the state of affairs at Colossae, which summoned him to give practical advice, and to crystallize his thoughts upon certain doctrinal details, in particular, upon the relation of the Son of God to supernatural beings, and the consequent attitude the believer to both them and him.<sup>1</sup>

Another objection against Pauline authorship of the epistle is that there are certain strange words and phrases in Colossians which are not typically Pauline. This objection is then turned around. Some of the more prominent words and phrases which are recognized as Pauline are absent from this epistle.

There are thirty-three words found in Colossians that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament. There are twenty-nine words found in Colossians which are found elsewhere in Paul's writings, if the Pastorals and Hebrews are designated as Pauline. Twenty words occur in Colossians which are found elsewhere in the New Testament, but not in Paul's writings. There are twenty-one words which are peculiar to Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon and Colossians. Eleven of these latter words are absolutely found in the New Testament and ten of the words are relative to Paul.<sup>2</sup> Peake undertakes to explain some of this strange vocabulary in this manner:

There are also strange collections of words (of which Haupt gives a good list), many being combinations of two or three dependent genetives, accumulated

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. Li.      <sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. XLI.

synonyms, numerous compound words. But these features may be partially paralleled in the earlier letters; and where they cannot be we may rightly lay stress on the difference of Paul's circumstances and the problems with which he had to deal.<sup>1</sup>

Words and phrases were changed to meet the situation at hand. Comparison with other writings is hardly a gauge for Paul's vocabulary. If Paul could write in terms of the Jews, so his language could be understood by them, it is not impossible to think he could do the same with the heretics in Colossae. Paul had a different situation with which to contend in Colossae. Paul would not answer Gentile philosophers in terms of Jewish thought, but would fight fire with fire. If it is wisdom they wanted, it was wisdom Paul would give them, only in terms of Christianity.

Abbott states the case in this way:

In comparing the general tone of the Epistle with that of the other Epistles it must be observed that St. Paul had not here to contend with any opposition directed against him or his teaching, nor had he to defend himself against objections, but was simply called on to express his judgment on the novel additions to the gospel teaching which were being pressed on the Colossians. This new teaching had not yet gained acceptance or led to factions divisions amongst them. Nor had he any longer occasion to argue that the Gentiles are admitted to the Christian Church on equal terms with Jews; this question is no longer agitated here; St. Paul's own solution of the problem is assumed. Nor was he concerned here with the conditions of salvation, whether by faith or by the words of the law. If he does not adduce proof from the O. T. neither does he do this in Phil., where there might seem to be more occasion for doing so.

The greater stress laid here on knowledge and wisdom is explained by the fact that the false teachers were endeavoring to dazzle their hearers by a show of profound wisdom to which the apostle opposes the true wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 489. <sup>2</sup>Abbott, op. cit., p. Liii.

One may ask, "where did Paul acquire such a large vocabulary?" Paul was a traveler. His education was not of a meager variety. Xenophon, who was a traveler and writer, had a vast and seemingly inexhaustible vocabulary. This vocabulary was gained from his changing surroundings. Paul also could have added and adjusted his vocabulary much like Xenophon.<sup>1</sup>

The style of writing in the epistle is also questioned in regards to Pauline authorship. The style in this letter is more laborious and slow moving in thought, while earlier Pauline writings are swift and pointed. In Colossians, "participles are left in suspense; relative sentences follow each other in sometimes ambiguous connections; phrases are flung out abruptly in almost unintelligible connections which have suggested the possibilities of a corruption in the text. e.g. 2: 23."<sup>2</sup> No one knows exactly what caused this style. It may have been ill health or mental anxiety. It could have been the slowness of the scribe in writing the lightning chain thoughts of Paul as the apostle dictated to him. It could have been the lack of knowledge of the situation.<sup>3</sup> Robertson is content to think that the same solutions which are given for the vocabulary can be given for the style.<sup>4</sup> Lightfoot says that, "the divergence of style is not greater than will appear in the letters of any active minded man, written at different times and under dif-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. Lii.      <sup>2</sup>E. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 23.

ferent circumstances.<sup>1</sup> He also explains that, "it is the very compression of the thoughts which creates the difficulty."<sup>2</sup>

The appearance of long sentences in Colossians does not take away Pauline authorship. Two of the longest sentences in Colossians are found in 1: 19-20 and 2: 8-12. However, after reading Romans 1: 1-7; 2: 5-10; Galatians 2: 3-5, 6-9, it is not surprising to find the same type of sentence structure in Colossians. Pauline authorship cannot be eliminated by this type of thought. And so, the denial of Pauline authorship on the basis of Gnosticism, Christology and sentence structure is not sufficient to discredit it as such.

The authenticity of the epistle is no longer questioned as much as the literary integrity of the letter. The reason for this is that there seemed to be no justifiable cause for denying Pauline authorship by attacking its authenticity. This has been noted. Then too, literary criticism seems to be the better method of determining the authorship of Colossians. This type of study involves theories of interpolation to solve the problem of authorship. It poses two queries. One involves the literary relation between Colossians and Ephesians. The second task for literary criticism is to separate the imposed non-Pauline sections from that which was the original framework of the epistle.

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 123f.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.124



These two problems are really the results of the same study. This study involves a detailed comparison of Colossians with Ephesians. The result of such a study determines which was written first and what parts of each epistle, if any, were originally Pauline.

There has been more than one attempt to compare Ephesians and Colossians, but Holtzmann's Theory seems to be the traditional one cited. However, even this theory is no longer tenable because it is too complicated to be probable. Then too, by this scholar's same methods, modern scholarship has given precedence to Pauline authorship. Moffatt reviews Holtzmann's theory in this brief excerpt:

Holtzmann's ingenious and complicated theory postulates an original Pauline epistle, directed against the legal and ascetic tendencies of the Colossians; this was worked up by the autor ad Ephesios, first of all, into the canonical Ephesians, as a protest against a Jewish-Christian theosophy, and afterwards remodelled separately into the canonical Colossian.<sup>1</sup>

There are passages in Ephesians which are almost identical with the Colossian letter. This is verified by comparing Colossians 3:18-25 with Ephesians 5:22,25 and 6:1,4,5,6,7,8 and 9; Colossians 2:8 with Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:5,8 with Ephesians 5:3,4 and Colossians 3:16,17 with Ephesians 5:19,20. There are one-hundred and fifty-five verses in Ephesians, fifty-four of which show a likeness to verses in Colossians.<sup>2</sup> The resemblances in the two epistles

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<sup>1</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 29.

either were the work of the same author, or the writer of one borrowed phrases and context from one and used them in writing the other epistle. Holtzmann postulates even a more complicated theory. According to him, not only is Ephesians the work of an interpolator, but much of Colossians has been doctored to give it an antignostic turn. Holtzmann believed that the authentic Pauline epistle to the Colossians contained only the legalistic and ascetic sections. Holtzmann's view really poses more questions, which when answered, validate Pauline authorship.

One serious objection to Holtzmann's theory is that if Ephesians and Colossians were written partly or entirely by one writer, it is just as logical to postulate Paul as the sole author as anyone else. After noting that many of the ideas contained in Colossians are found in Paul's earlier epistles, there is no reason to doubt that he was at least the author of this letter. If Paul wrote one he may have borrowed from the other; may have repeated passages of one from memory or may have used the same ideas in writing one as the other, since the same problems were counteracted in both instances. They may have been written on the same day, or with the same purpose in mind when writing. Both epistles are individual letters, and must be taken as such. As Radford points out, this hypothesis involves more questions than it settles. He then asks this:

Why did this ingenious redactor borrow from Colossians alone in writing his Ephesians, and not from the other

Pauline epistles also? What authority is there for dividing the Colossian heresy into two sections or stages? How did the redactor manage to get his own later expansion of Colossians into circulation in the presence of the original Pauline letter? How did the original vanish while the substitute survived?<sup>1</sup>

Then too, if an interpolator was responsible for Ephesians and Colossians it is logical that he would not write two letters so much alike. In all probability one letter would have accomplished the task. Then too, if one were to forge an epistle, an insignificant town such as Colossae would not be selected as the designation for such a writing. Also, it is not probable that the interpolator would have mentioned anything about Laodicea or the epistle connected with this larger city. Why did he not forge an epistle to the Laodiceans?<sup>2</sup>

Philemon is usually accepted by modern scholarship as a genuine epistle of Paul. Robertson notes that Colossians can also be accepted if Philemon is considered Pauline, because the same list of persons appear in both letters. Not only that, but the tone of both writings is basically the same. Goodspeed brings a fresh approach for postulating Pauline authorship in the following:

But, further than this, the supposition that someone was imitating Paul and writing letters in his name implies that Paul was already well known as a letter writer, and this would come about only through the

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and Philemon (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), p. 14.

collection and publication of his letters, which would lead people to think of him as a letter writer and he prepared to respect a letter that bore his name. But he was not so regarded until long after his death, indeed until after the publication of Luke-Acts which knows nothing about him as a letter writer.<sup>1</sup>

Von Soden subjected Holtzmann's theory to drastic criticism. In his primary studies Von Soden rejected as much in Colossians as did Holtzmann. However, his final studies show that he came to reject only two verses, Colossians 1: 16b, 17.<sup>2</sup> The majority of modern scholarship is usually willing to accept the entire epistle as a literary work of Paul.

Unbiased scholarship has come to question a few passages in Colossians. By the study of manuscripts there seems to be a few insertions of marginal glosses into the text. Interpolations have been suspected in Colossians 1:15-20, 23 and 2:1.<sup>3</sup> It might be noted that some scholars are prone to regard these passages as interpolations, because of the difficulty in understanding the meaning of them. It may have been that the epistle, especially the second chapter, was not well preserved in ancient times. Thus we have a few minor errors in the preservation of the text. These errors do not necessarily point to an editing of the text, but simply infer that difficulties entered

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<sup>1</sup>E. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

into its preservation.

Lake believes that Pauline authorship of Colossians is doubtful, because of the tense used in relation to the kingdom. In Corinthians, which is an authentic work of Paul, the kingdom will come with Christ. However, in Colossians, the kingdom has come. Thus Lake says:

It should be noted that this is the main argument against Pauline authorship of Colossians. It might be regarded as conclusive if Paul had sent this letter to Corinth, but the possibility exists that he expressed his belief in Corinthians in Corinthian terminology but did so in Colossians in syncretistic terminology. This is conceivable, but it does not seem to us a wholly convincing argument and perhaps a Paulinist of the second generation wrote the Epistle just as another Paulinist wrote Hebrews and probably yet another the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>1</sup>

But as Fowler points out, "it is more difficult to believe that another mind could develop these new aspects of Paul's thought without betraying more difference from the foundations of his thinking than to accept the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians."<sup>2</sup>

Since the Pauline authorship of Colossians has been adequately established, attention will now be given to the place of writing and date. Again, there are theories as to where Paul was when he wrote Colossians. As expected, there is no universal agreement among scholars. Only the most predominant theories will be discussed in regard to the place of writing. Of course, the date of writing will largely depend upon the place of writing. Since Paul

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<sup>1</sup>Kirsop Lake and Silva Lake, An Introduction to the New Testament (Harper and Brothers, 1937), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>H. T. Fowler, op. cit., p. 242.

traveled widely for his day, there would often be years of difference in his visit from one section of the country to the other. Each place of writing involves a different dating of the time of writing.

One of the places which is postulated as the place of writing the Colossian epistle is Caesarea. Peake reviews the reasoning of some of the advocates of this theory in the following explanation:

Meger, Weiss, Haupt have argued for Caesarea. What Weiss regards as decisive is that Paul speaks in Philemon of going to Colossae on his release, whereas in Philippians, written from Rome, he says that he hopes to go to Macedonia. But this proves nothing, for Macedonia might have been taken on the way; and besides, Paul's plans might have changed in the interval. Haupt thinks that the genuineness of the letters can be maintained only on the assumption that they were written at Caesarea, since letters so unlike Philippians cannot have been so near to it as their composition at Rome would demand. He thinks their peculiar character is best explained by the fact that Paul in his confinement, unable to preach, was driven in upon himself, and thought out more fully than before the implication of his Gospel. The fruit of this we find in Colossians and Ephesians.<sup>1</sup>

Radford explains the Caesarean hypothesis by reviewing the two arguments used for its presentation. The first is that Philippians, being so different from Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians, was written from its traditional Roman setting while these other three, similar in nature, were written earlier. Caesarea is the place relied upon for their writings. However, Philippians tends to resemble Romans and Corinthians. It is difficult to explain why the

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<sup>1</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 491.

earlier style of Paul would be dated subsequent to such an epistle as Colossians. The second argument is also based on a comparison of Colossians with Philippians. In Colossians Paul is burdened with his bonds, while in Philippians he rejoices in his confinement; the point being that the confinement in Caesarea was more limited than in Rome. Upon comparing the apostle's spirit in these two letters, it would seem that Colossians was written in Caesarea while Philippians bears the stamp of Rome. This type of reason neglects to take into consideration the purpose of writing each epistle, and to regard each as a unit within itself.<sup>1</sup> Different conditions call for different solutions.

Zahn describes Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea by the following:

At Caesarea Paul was kept in chains in Herod's pretorium under military guard; he was not harshly treated; his friends were allowed to visit him, and to provide him with whatever he wanted (Acts XXiii.35, XXIV. 23, 27, XXVI. 29, 31). Of preaching activity, however, during this imprisonment there is no hint in Acts. It is also very unlikely that Paul would have felt at liberty to preach in a city of Palestine especially if the division of their respective fields of labour, agreed upon by Paul and the older apostles a little more than six years before he was arrested, was primarily a geographical division.<sup>2</sup>

There are other reasons which are given in favor of Caesarea, but upon investigation, these reasons can be used

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>T. Zahn, Introduction To The New Testament Trans. from 3rd German edition under direction of M. W. Jacobus (Edinburgh: J. and J. Clark, 1909), Vol. I, p. 265.

as objections against Colossians being written there. It is held that most of the companions Paul had with him, as listed in Colossians, were companions of Paul before he reached Rome. However, the long list of helpers in Colossians would point to a large city of endeavor, which Caesarea was not. In all probability these companions, at the time of the writing of Colossians, were laboring in a large city.<sup>1</sup> Rome seems most likely to have been the city.

Paul indicates to the people to Colossae that he intended to come to visit them shortly. If Paul were in Caesarea he would not be planning to visit in that vicinity since he was awaiting shipment to Rome. His one aim was to visit Rome, accommodations being made for his wish by civil authorities. It is not likely Paul would be planning to visit Colossae when Rome appeared so large on the horizon.<sup>2</sup>

Paul also speaks in figurative language of an "open door" for declaring the mystery of Christ.<sup>3</sup> It is hardly likely that such a statement should be issued at Caesarea, because this territory lay in the territory of the Jerusalem apostles. Paul never seemed to infringe upon the territory of the other apostles. Philip, the evangelist, lived at Caesarea; and if the name implies anything, he probably had labored in that region.<sup>4</sup> This would give Paul more reason for not making such a statement to the Colossians.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 443. <sup>2</sup>L.B.Radford, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 4: 3. <sup>4</sup>Acts 21: 8-15.



If Philip, with his four daughters, did live in Caesarea it is likely that he was among Paul's friends who visited him in his confinement.<sup>1</sup> If so, surely Paul would have not omitted Philip in his list of companions who had aided and comforted him. Perhaps Philip was one of the Jewish Christians who was unsympathetic towards Paul's labors, and so the omission of his name in the list of companions may be accredited to this hypothesis. If Philip was antagonistic Paul could have given his name in a negative mention, but the fact remains that he did not.

Onesimus, the slave, ran away from Philemon. Chances are he would not go to Caesarea. At least he would be less apt to go to Caesarea than Rome. Those who think Onesimus fled to Caesarea do so because Caesarea was nearer to Colossae than Rome, and because he could locate Paul more easily in Caesarea than he could in densely populated Rome. These are just the reasons why Onesimus would not go to Caesarea. Although Caesarea was closer than Rome, Onesimus would not likely have been admitted to see Paul in Caesarea. Rome was known as a refuge for slaves while Caesarea was not. Since Rome was the larger place it would be a haven for a runaway slave. Onesimus could easily contact Paul in Rome for it would be less difficult for a slave to travel in Rome than it would be in a Jewish section of territory. Onesimus, being a Gentile, would be questioned more in Caesarea than Rome.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 24:23.

The possibilities of Colossians being written in Caesarea are slight and improbable. The circumstances involving Paul's stay there did not warrant strong evidence for his writing Colossians from that place. Little information is had of Paul's stay there. In fact, "the two years in Caesarea are certainly a blank, and as certainly Paul must have been active during this interval, but we are not entitled, without adequate evidence to fill up this blank by placing Colossians or any other epistle within its limits."<sup>1</sup>

Ephesus has also been suggested for the place of writing Colossians. If Ephesus is named as a possible place of writing it would be necessary to postulate an imprisonment of Paul there. In II Corinthians 11:23, Paul says that he had been "in prisons more abundantly".<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians, being written from Ephesus, indicates Paul had encountered more than the usual opposition in that place; for he speaks of adversaries, hourly peril, daily dying and fighting with beasts.<sup>3</sup> The language in II Corinthians would indicate an even graver condition.<sup>4</sup> The latter part of Romans speaks of "fellow prisoners", and dangers involved in the surroundings of the writer.<sup>5</sup> It is open to question whether some

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<sup>1</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 159. <sup>2</sup>II Corinthians 11:23.

<sup>3</sup>I Corinthians 15:30-32; 16:9.

<sup>4</sup>II Corinthians 1:8,9; 4:8-10; 6:9.

<sup>5</sup>Romans 16: 3,4,7.

of the fighting terminology used by Paul is literal or an expression which was to be taken in a metaphorical sense.

The internal evidence of the epistle pointing to an Ephesian imprisonment is also upheld by historical traditions. There is a ruined tower in Ephesus which still is denoted "St. Paul's Prison". The Acts of Paul and Thekla, a second century document, speaks of an imprisonment of Paul in Ephesus. The Monarchian Prologues, which are short introductions prefixed to Paul's epistles, indicates that Colossians was written from Ephesus. Of course, these prefixes are the prefixes of a later scholar.<sup>1</sup>

It is also argued that Onesimus would more likely go to Ephesus than either Caesarea or Rome. Ephesus is closer than either of these two remote places. Duncan, who is the most recent advocate of the Ephesian hypothesis, believes the case of Onesimus to favor his theory.<sup>2</sup>

Duncan gives several additional reasons why Paul wrote from Ephesus. Paul indicated he was intending to visit Colossae. Rome was Paul's objective while he was in Caesarea. Spain was his objective while he was in Rome; but Colossae was so near Ephesus that such statements would not be out of place if Ephesus be his writing station.<sup>3</sup> Duncan also notes that if there was a church at Ephesus Paul would not have neglected a visit to it before he left Asia.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>G. S. Duncan St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930) pp. 59-161.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 158

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 76

This could only be probable if he was in Ephesus at the time of writing to the Colossians. By tracing the movements of Timothy with Paul, Duncan concludes that conditions best fit Ephesus for writing all the prison epistles. In fact Duncan asserts that the list of companions of Paul, as given in Colossians, leaves no other choice than that of Ephesus for the place of writing.<sup>1</sup> Duncan's work is worthwhile reading and gives the best argument for the Ephesian hypothesis that has been written by contemporary scholars.

Riddle and Hutson advocate the Ephesian theory. Their reasons are somewhat the same as Duncan's but they do add one or two new ideas. Colossians, in their opinion, was written in the midst of Paul's fervent evangelistic work; the most intensive campaign being held at Ephesus. They also believe that Colossians does not show a late development of Paul's thought which, of course, would date the letter earlier than the Roman imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> "Perhaps the strangest argument in favor of it is geography."<sup>3</sup> Geography includes a discussion relating to the circumstances which fits the epistle best to the Ephesian theory.

There are further objections to selecting Ephesus as the place of writing Colossians. It is doubtful whether

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 146-157.

<sup>2</sup>D. Riddle and H. Hutson New Testament Life and Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

there could have been a church arise in Colossae, became involved in such a complicated heresy and became such a prominent place of importance during Paul's stay of about three years in Ephesus. Paul could have intended to visit Colossae from Rome as well as Ephesus. The doctrinal problems existing in Asia may have called for a revision of plans while the apostle was in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Thus Paul revised his plans and decided to return to Asia to strengthen the churches for which he had so great a concern.

As for Onesimus, it is doubtful whether he would go so near to his home as Ephesus. It was too unsafe at Ephesus for a runaway slave so near home. As for Paul's companions, it is doubtful where Luke was with Paul in Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> This is decided upon by evidence given in the "we" sections of Acts. Then too, it is conjectured whether Mark was reinstated in good graces with Paul as early as the apostle's stay in Ephesus. This would push the date later, which would point to Rome.<sup>3</sup>

The most conclusive argument against the Ephesian hypothesis is the lack of any direct New Testament reference to an imprisonment of Paul in Ephesus. Radford presents this argument by the following explanation:

It is quite possible that there was such an imprisonment. But the imprisonment in which Colossians and its

<sup>1</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 445.

<sup>2</sup>E. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 15.

companion epistles were written was an experience which left a deep mark upon St. Paul's life and outlook. It is almost incredible that an imprisonment long enough to give room for the writing of these epistles, and serious enough to make a landmark in the apostle's ministry, should not be mentioned in the detailed story of his Ephesian mission (Acts XIX), in which St. Luke is apparently drawing upon ample information from trustworthy sources, nor again in St. Paul's own retrospect of that mission in his farewell address to the presbyters of Ephesus at Miletus (Acts XX 17-25).<sup>1</sup>

The most prominent theory regarding the writing of the Colossian epistle is that Paul wrote it while he was in Rome. The majority of scholars consulted accepted this view rather than either the Caesarean or Ephesian hypothesis. It is known that Paul was in prison while in Rome. Paul had freedom of movement in Rome, at least more than is known during his previous confinements. Then too, Rome was a famous refuge for slaves. The question of how Onesimus managed to travel there maybe asked of any slave who fled to Rome for security.

If Ephesians is allowed to be dated during Paul's Roman imprisonment there is ample proof that Colossians also should receive the same date for both epistles are similar in their nature. Ephesians bears the stamp of a Roman atmosphere. Colossians, is much like Ephesians. They are inseparable. Thus:

If the encyclical epistle unfolds the vision of the Catholic Church as the Empire of Christ, the local epistle unfolds no less vividly the vision of the cosmic sovereignty of the Christ, in which even the Catholic Church is but one kingdom, though it be the kingdom which is to win all other kingdoms in earth and heaven for God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

Most scholars consulted believe Rome to be the acceptable thesis for the writing of Colossians. Goodspeed contends for Rome<sup>1</sup> Abbott never even conjectures Rome as the place of writing.<sup>2</sup> Moffatt concludes that Rome is the acceptable solution.<sup>3</sup> Of the scholars consulted Allen and Grensted, Abbott, Bacon, Cartledge, Clogg, Conybeare and Hawson, Erdman, Peake, Enslin, Föwler, Hayes, Julicher, Lightfoot, Lenski, Linn, McNeile, Moule, Miller, McClure, Phillips, Robertson, Radford, Ramsay, Scott, Sabatier, Thiessen, Williams, Zahn and the above mentioned in this paragraph believe Rome to be the writing center for Colossians. The date of writing depends upon the place. If Paul wrote from Ephesus the date would fall sometimes during his stay there. Duncan, an advocate of the Ephesian theory, dates Colossians in the spring of 55 A. D.<sup>5</sup> His stay in Ephesus is usually dated from 52 A. D. to 55 A. D. The dating of Colossians would then fall within this period. If the Ephesian theory is accepted Duncan's date is probably as accurate as any calculation.

Zahn dates Paul's stay in Caesarea from 58 A. D. to the late summer of 60 A. D.<sup>6</sup> If Paul wrote to the Colossians it is probable that the epistle would have been written between 59 A. D. and the spring of 60 A. D. This

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<sup>1</sup>E.Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Abbott, op. cit., p. LIX. <sup>3</sup>A.Abbott, op. cit., p.156.

<sup>4</sup>See book listings in Bibliography.

<sup>5</sup>G.S.Duncan, op. cit., p. 298

<sup>6</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 442.

gives time for Paul to receive news of the situation in Colossae; to formulate ideas to the solution of the problem; and both want to come to them, yet change his mind in giving Rome the preference for his appearance.

The Roman imprisonment is usually placed between the dates 59 A. D. to 61 A. D.<sup>1</sup> There are variations in these dates. Lightfoot, after reviewing the chronology of events places the imprisonment between the dates 61 A. D. to 63 A. D.<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot places the date of Colossians in 63 A. D. Differences in dating the writing of Colossians is partially due to an earthquake which happened around the time of writing.<sup>3</sup> This earthquake was no common one for it practically ruined Laodicea.

Tacticus, our earliest authority, dates the event in the year 60 A. D. Eusebius, who is considered the more reliable, dates the quake in 64 A. D. If the event occurred in the earlier date some mention of it would be expected in the Colossian epistle, at least in reference to Laodicea. Lightfoot sets the date so as to be either late in relation to Tacticus' account of the event or prior to Eusebius' calculation.

Scholars vary a year or two in reckoning the time of writing due to the earthquake. There is also a slight variance of dating the epistle due to scholar's dating of

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 37f.<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



other epistles, especially Philippians. If Philippians is dated earlier than Colossians then Colossians was written during the latter part of the Roman imprisonment. Williams reasons in this way and thus dates the epistle between 62 A. D. and 63 A. D.<sup>1</sup> We therefore place the writing of Colossians at some months later, of not more, than Philippians but while he was still a prisoner, and therefore, still at Rome.<sup>2</sup> Robertson also gives the epistle this later date.<sup>3</sup> Erdman does the same.<sup>4</sup> Abbott is also among those who place the epistle at the later date.<sup>5</sup> Goodspeed dates the epistle at about 61 A. D.<sup>6</sup> Moffatt is also numbered among these scholars.<sup>7</sup> There are others who hold the same view, but usually quote of the above mentioned as a basis for their thought.

Because there is no mention of the earthquake, B. W. Bacon dates the epistle earlier than any mention of the event. He thinks Paul must have been in prison from 58 A. D. to 60 A. D., and thus the epistle falls within these two years.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. Williams op. cit., p. L.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. LXVIII.

<sup>3</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>C. Erdman, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. LIX.

<sup>6</sup>E. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>7</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>8</sup>B. W. Bacon An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 108.

Peake contends for the date 59 A. D. He says that, "three years lay between Romans and the earliest time at which Philippians could have been written and less than eighteen months between this time and the latest date that can be assigned to Colossians".<sup>1</sup> This brings the range of date of writing anywhere between the years 59 A. D. to 63 A. D.

The exact date really cannot be calculated precisely, but the important fact is that the epistle was written in Rome by Paul. In searching for a conclusion to this chapter on authorship a gem was found in Radford's work. It is his own conclusion on the section dealing with authorship. His conclusion is as follows:

No question of interpretation is affected by its precise year of writing. It is the approximate date which is significant, and its significance lies in the fact that the Crucifixion was only thirty years distant. Twenty years after the Crucifixion the first epistle to the Thessalonians, probably the earliest Christian document, reveals the Church as a community founded on belief in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Lord and Savior of mankind. Ten years later, this letter to Colossae reveals a far richer development of that simple faith, resting partly on the meditation of the apostle in his own spiritual experience and partly on the experience of the faith in the life of the Church. The doctrine of the sovereignty of Christ in the realm of nature as well as in the realm of grace - the doctrine of the Cross as not only an atonement but also a triumph - the doctrine of the Christian life as a mystical union with a living Christ - These are not late developments of a post-apostolic Christianity influenced by Hellenistic or Oriental religious ideals; they are early developments of an apostolic theology thought out on the basis of a personal experience - the individual experience of a 'Hebrew of the Hebrews'

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 492.

for whom the whole world was altered by the entry of Christ into his soul - the corporate experience of communities of men and women, Jewish, Syrian, Phryzian, Greek, Latin to whom Christ was not a pathetic memory of their own or their teachers' recollections, but an immediate and an abiding power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., pp. 17, 18.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

The apostle Paul always had a purpose in mind which occasioned the writing of his epistles. "There must have been special conditions, therefore, existing only at Colossae and to some extent also in Laodicea, which called for the writing of the Colossian letter."<sup>1</sup> However, since Paul did not always state his problem, but rather dealt with it directly, the existing cause for the writing of some of his epistles is not as clear as others. This is his manner of writing the Colossian Epistle. The purpose of this chapter is to discern the reason for the writing of the Colossian Epistle, and to understand more clearly what scholars term "the Colossian Heresy."

The "Colossian heresy," is so called, because the epistle indicates that there were certain persons in this church who were abusing the Christianity that was being preached by Paul and his fellow companions. The most unpardonable element in the whole matter was the fact that these heretics were probably members of the church. This is indicative by the phrase, "not holding fast the head."<sup>2</sup> These false teachers were superimposing regulations and

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<sup>1</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 461.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians. 2:19.

ethical ideals which were being enforced as a proposed means to a higher type of Christianity than had been preached unto them by Epaphras. The teaching was a leavening influence in the church at Colossae, which tended to confuse and thwart the faith of the entire church. According to Lewis it did this in two ways: (1) The first danger was that the gospel was brought under the bonds of the law. Thus the gospel was secondary. (2) The second danger was that their worship of angels and other supposed but unknown powers; their false ideas of Christ and the material world; would lapse into contemporary paganism.<sup>1</sup> Then too, as Radford notes, there was a danger that the false teaching prominent in Colossae might spread.<sup>2</sup> This condition called for teaching from the pen of Paul.

Internal evidence in the epistle affords a background for a beginning investigation for a solution of this "Colossian Heresy." However, even this research is not a sufficient basis for an adequate solution of the problem, for the sum total of this investigation does not bring a unanimity of agreement among scholars. Therefore, after presenting some internal factors which introduce references to the heresy, we will examine these references as handled by some outstanding New Testament scholars.

The internal evidence in the epistle can be divided

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lewis, "Colossians, Epistle to," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. III, (1937).

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 43.

into two parts. There are direct references to the heresy which can be labeled as Jewish teaching. The Jewish teaching is called the direct reference because it is more apparent in the language of the epistle. However, certain language in the epistle against the false teachers may not be directed to Jews. The possibility of identifying the false teachers, other than Jews, causes the differences of opinion as to their exact identification. Scholars are divided in the identification of the false teachers, at least as to whether the heresy can be completely blamed on the Jews, or whether there were additional influences working in the church which were not primarily Jewish.

The difficulty in identifying the personnel of the heresy is not necessarily due to the fact that Paul does not make himself clear in his writing. Paul probably had never visited the city of Colossae, and therefore, did not know the problem personally, as he did those of some of the cities in which he preached.<sup>1</sup> Then again, since Paul did not have a face to face contact with these people, he did not write as scourging a reply as he had been known to pen. Paul probably intended this condition to be further settled by one of his fellow workers.<sup>2</sup> One last and important observation which causes obscurity in identifying the heretics could be due to the fact that this situation may have been

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:7; 2; 1.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 4:7-10.

somewhat new in the experience of the early church; and though Paul probably knew the essence of the false teaching, he did not set out to systematically elaborate upon it, but to correct it. Possibly it did not possess a name. At least scholars are not decided upon its nature.

There was a distinct Jewish flavoring existing in the false teaching at Colossae. Evidence points to the fact that Jews may have lived in the area. There were various times when a number of Jews left Palestine, either by force or migration. Gilbert gives four instances when Jews migrated from Palestine to Asia. After the death of Alexander many Jews moved to Egypt and Phoenicia. Antiochus the Great transplanted two thousand Jews from Babylon to central Asia Minor.. Herod the Great, had five thousand Jews to occupy the Trachonites region, east of Galilee, so as to guard the country from robbers. They were sent to help stabilize its wavering civilization. In the time of Actapanes III, two Jews of Nihardea on the Euphrates became leaders of a robber gang who defied the king's troops. Gilbert thus shows the probability of Jews living in the region of Colossae.<sup>1</sup> Williams refers to a statement issued by Cicero in which Jews are mentioned to be living in Laodicea. Williams also indicates that we have a dispatch from the authorities of Laodicea to proconsul C. Robbélius, which disclaims any intention of interfering with the religious freedom of the Jews.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. H. Gilbert, Greek Thought in the New Testament (New York: Macmillan Company. 1928), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. XIV.

Radford says that:

The amount of money confiscated by the propositior Flaccus in 62 B. C., when he prohibited the contributions of the Jews to the Temple, which meant a serious exportation of money to Palestine, points to a population of adult and Jewish freedom variously estimated from eight to twelve thousand; and this probably only represents the ascertained portion of local Jewish wealth.<sup>1</sup>

Some of these Jews became Christians according to McNeile. McNeile describes them as follows:

There were many Jews in the neighborhood who had become Christians. But they were different in character from the Judiazers who had troubled the Gentile Christians at Galatia. The Jews in and around the Lycus Valley were affected by the variety of foreign tendencies which went to form the popular ideas of the surrounding Phrygian paganism, including Greek philosophical speculations, and mystical theosophy from the East. The Colossian heresy cannot be described as purely Jewish, though its authors were Jews by race. There can hardly have been a single Jew in the district whose religious and intellectual ideas were unaffected by foreign influences.<sup>2</sup>

If there were not primarily a Jewish leaven working in the heresy at least there was an active Jewish influence. Paul devotes space to explain that baptism in Christ, which is a circumcision not made with hands, has replaced the Jewish legal rite for entrance into the church.<sup>3</sup> Along with denouncing the Jewish rite the apostle warns against passing judgment with respect to the abstinence of certain food and drink.<sup>4</sup> Festivals, feast days; even the Sabbath, are recog-

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<sup>1</sup> L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> A. H. McNeile, St. Paul: His Life, Letters and Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: University Press, 1920), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 2:11-14.      <sup>4</sup> Colossians 2:16.



nized as of no effect in their Jewish setting.<sup>1</sup> As Zahn points out, "The very mention of Sabbath proves that the representatives of this doctrine belonged to Judaism."<sup>2</sup> Paul says that, "These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Along with these Jewish inferences there is a subtle undertone of thought which seems to point at other fallacies involved in the heresy. Not only did a Jewish ritualism prevail, but Paul's language also points to a mysticism and an asceticism. These other characteristics were not necessarily Jewish. However, as Peake says, "we are certain of the Jewish nature of the teaching, and if it can be explained from Judaism above, we have no warrant for calling in other sources."<sup>4</sup>

Among these conjectured items in the heresy is angel worship, false reasoning, philosophy and empty deceit, wisdom, human precepts and a false asceticism. These, according to Williams, are the direct references to the teaching which indicate a source other than Jewish.<sup>5</sup> He also lists the following an indirect references to the heresy: 1:15-20, 23, 27, 28: 2:2, 3, 6, 9-15.<sup>6</sup>

Erdman compactly analyzes these Gentile teachings

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:16

<sup>2</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 464.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:16

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 2:17

<sup>5</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. XVIII.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. XVIII, XIX.

into practices of asceticism and mysticism.<sup>1</sup> McNeile names two predominate aspects in the teachings; that of angel worships and asceticism.<sup>2</sup> It can be said that there was, "first, a combination of angel worship and asceticism; secondly, a self-styled philosophy or gnosis, which depreciated Christ, thirdly, a rigid observance of Jewish festivals and the Sabbath."<sup>3</sup> Lightfoot places wisdom, intelligence, knowledge and perfection as the key note in the pagan influence of the heresy.<sup>4</sup> Erdman expresses a generally conceded fact of most present day scholars by the following:

Great stress is laid upon the words "knowledge" (Greek γνῶσις), and "philosophy" (φιλοσοφία) and "fulness" (πληρώματα) in the epistle, which are said by the apostle to oppose such beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Most scholars, before the turn of this century, identified the false teachers solely as Jews. Although a Gnostic import was partially recognized in the heresy, it was denied as an active influence. Scholars thought that Gnosticism was not an active force until the second century;

<sup>1</sup>C. R. Erdman, The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1933), pp. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup>A. McNeile, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Hawson, The Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, n. d.), p. 643.

<sup>4</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>5</sup>C. R. Erdman, op. cit., pp. 16, 17.

therefore, it would have been impossible to recognize it as conflicting with Christianity in the time of Paul. If Gnosticism is the prevailing problem, then Pauline authorship is denied. This places the epistle at a later date minus Pauline authorship. The Tubingen school held this theory in relation to the solution of the problem. Since Gnosticism was not prevalent and Jewish legalism is apparent in the writing, the heresy was limited solely to Jewish influence. Moffatt, in receiving the policy of the Tubingen school, notes that if any Gnosticism was prevalent it was listed as Gnostic Ebionism.<sup>1</sup> The following quotation reverts to Moffatt's review of some former scholar's opinions in relation to an explanation of the heresy:

The errorists have been identified as Jews with theosophic or Alexandrian tendencies (Exclhorn, Junber, Schnechenburger), as pagans with Pychagorean (Grotius) or Oriental (Hug) affinities, or as Christians tinged with Essene ideas (Mangold, Kloppe, Weiss); the *φιδσοφία* has been assigned to a definite source such as Mithraism (A. Stermaan in Strassburg. Drozesanblatt, 1906, 105-18) or Cerethus (Mayerhoff, R. Scott, after Nitysch). The affinities with Essenism, emphasized by Thiersch, Ewald, Lightfoot, and Gadet amongst others, do not amount to very much; the parallel on angel worship breaks down the practice of asceticism differs and other traits of the Colossian errorists do not correspond exactly to those of the Essenes.<sup>2</sup>

Only a few present day scholars limit the Colossian Heresy to Jewish influences. However there are some contemporary thinkers who would either limit the false teaching

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<sup>1</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

solely to the Jews or to a sect of the Jews, such as the Essenes. The Essenes are selected because they best fit into the mystic and ascetic practices of the errorists, and because they are akin to Judaism. However, if Essenism and Gnosticism are eliminated entirely from the heresy, the Jews remain the sole agitators.

Erdman takes somewhat of this view. He dates Gnosticism as a second century heresy.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he does not believe an Essene influence present in the heresy for he says that, "it should be emphasized, however, that the home of the Essenes was on the shore of the Dead Sea, and we have no knowledge of their existence outside of Palestine."<sup>2</sup> He further declares that the "essential elements of Essenism were absent from the false teaching which had appeared in Colossae, and many scholars now regard as purely imaginary any connection between Essene Judaism and the Colossian errors."<sup>3</sup>

Erdman explains himself more fully by the appending quotation:

Beyond all question, however, they were Jewish either wholly or in large part. This is very evident from the emphasis laid upon the observance of feast days, of new moon and of Sabbaths, and further, upon the familiar rites of Judaism and its peculiar regard for the Mosaic law. It is evident, however, that the form of Jewish doctrine which was troubling the church differed in some respects from that to which Paul re-

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<sup>1</sup>C. R. Erdman, op. cit., p. 16.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

fers in his Epistle to the Galatians or to the Philippians. The later might be characterized as Pharisaic Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

Although Erdman has an open mind in admitting that there may have been other influences at work, such as Oriental speculation, a false mysticism, or mystery religions in Phrygia, his admission that Gnosticism cannot be a part of the heresy leaves him dependent upon the Jewish legalism, either entirely or predominately.<sup>2</sup>

Peake takes the same views as does Erdman. Peake thinks that the Jews involved were native born Phrygian Jews.<sup>3</sup> He holds that there were other characteristics not Jewish, and probably is not so enthusiastic in limiting it to the Jews alone. However, he does hold that there was a Jewish basis for the entire heresy. His thought probably did not see full crystalization in this writing. He does rely mainly upon Jewish influence to explain the heresy. A statement by him says that the "Phrygian Jews compromised with heathenism to an extent possible only to those who held their ancestor's faith most loosely. They probably accepted Christianity readily, and thus lost their identity."<sup>4</sup> Peake, as does Erdman, represents the turn of scholarship which was beginning to notice the possibility of Gnostic influence of some degree working in the heresy. Peake does give an

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<sup>1</sup>C. R. Erdman, op. cit., p. 15.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 478.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

interesting reason why Paul probably does not quote from the Old Testament. He says that "Paul does not establish his position by proof passages because this would have been unconvincing to his antagonists, who perhaps have evaded their force by allegorical interpretation."<sup>1</sup>

Although Lewis limits the heresy to the geographical area of Colossae, he believes the heresy to have been a Jewish one. He says that "the Colossian heresy is due to Judaistic influence on one hand and to native beliefs and superstitions on the other."<sup>2</sup> One characteristic of Lewis' thinking of the heresy is that there were no party of heretics in Colossae, but rather there was the growing prevalence of a higher ethical system which was endangering the Christian life. Along with this influence he writes that, "in any case there seems no sufficient group for postulating a specifically Gnostic or Oriental (non-Jewish) influence in the Church at Colossae."<sup>3</sup>

Alongside the theory that the heresy can be limited to the Jews, there is the supposition that these Jews were of a special kind. Since the language in the epistle contains inferences not directly related to Judaism, as the Galatian letter does, the Jewish influence is not considered

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis, "Colossians, Epistle to the" International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. J. Orr, Vol. II (1937).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

as the Jerusalem-Pharasaic type.<sup>1</sup> Then too, since there is strong Gentile speculation attached, it is thought that they were not from Palestine. Philosophy, knowledge and wisdom could only indicate one place for Jews. This place is Alexandria. An apt illustration of this type of thought is given by Conybeare and Hawson:

The most probable view, therefore, seems to be, that some Alexandrian Jew had appeared at Colossae professing a belief in Christianity and imbued with the Greek "philosophy" or school of Philo but combining with it the rabbinical theosophy and angelology which afterward was embodied in the Cubbalu, and an extravagant asceticism which also afterward distinguished several sects of the Gnostics.<sup>2</sup>

McGiffert believes these Jews to have been from Alexandria rather than from Palestine. He seems to think that there was not present the rigidity of Jewish legalism or Paul would have written in stronger terms against practices such as circumcision and food regulations. Because there is no urgent language of Paul regarding these Jewish practices, McGiffert believes the condition to have been a problem in the sphere of ethics rather than theology.<sup>3</sup> If Pharisaic Jews were involved, there would have been more than a rustle from the apostle concerning Jewish practices. This fact, plus the hint of an endangering philosophy, leads McGiffert to name the Alexandrian Jews

<sup>1</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Hawson, op. cit., p. 643.

<sup>3</sup>A. McGiffert, A History of Christianity In the Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 369.

as the false apostles. McGiffert does add an important note not given thus far by saying: "We have in Colossae the first appearance of syncretism of heathen and Christian ritual which in a developed form was so marked a feature of the religious life of the church of the fourth and following century."<sup>1</sup> It is important to keep in mind that McGiffert does not limit the heresy to the Jews, but the point is that he marks the Jewish element with an Alexandrian stamp.

Williams identifies the errorists as Colossian Jews who were influenced by outward circumstances. Williams describes these external influences as Persian paganism and Phrygian mysticism. As a basis for his argument he places an undue emphasis on angel worship. By tracing angel worship, both in the Jewish religion and in the religions of their neighbors, he comes to the conclusion that angel worship was not a custom in Jewish tradition. However, he notes that angel worship was prevalent in most Babylonian religions. After displaying this, he goes at length to show how some Babylonian religions passed into Persia; and since Persia was a commercial nation with Asia Minor, he concludes that angel worship entered Colossae from there. Any other non-Jewish tendencies in the heresy, which he does not specify, might be attributed to the religions of Phrygia. Williams realizes that the rigid

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.



Pharisaic Jew was not seriously swayed from his orthodox religion, but he does believe the pressure strong enough to change the displaced Jew in Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup>

Lightfoot probably has lain the foundation, whether acceptable or objectionable for the thinking of many present day scholars. Lightfoot propounds the teaching that at least the Jewish influence in the heresy can be accredited to the Essenes. Upon this theory he has written rather voluminously. Although Lightfoot is not heralded for his views on his Essene interpretation of the heresy, he is often not given credit for the fact that he was among the first to recognize a Gnostic tint in the language of the epistle.<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot paves the way for modern scholarship in recognizing the possibility of Gnosticism being prevalent; for even after he has considered earlier scholarship, he writes:

Yet still we still seem justified, even at an earlier date in speaking of these general ideas as Gnostic, guarding ourselves at the same time against misunderstanding with the twofold caution, that we here employ the term to express the simplest and most elementary conceptions of the tendency of thought, and that we do not postulate its use as a distinct designation of any sect or sects at this early date.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., pp. xii - xxxvii

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Lightfoot accredits the mystic and ascetic elements to an Essene tendency. He is very cautious, however, for he explains: "when I speak of the Judaism in the Colossian church as Essene, I do not assume a precise identity of origin, but only an essential affinity of type, with the Essenes of the mother country."<sup>1</sup> Essenes were present in Asia, claims Lightfoot, because we have indications of their presence in Asia Minor.<sup>2</sup>

Lightfoot analyzes the Essene tendencies in religion and also the Gnostic teachings; after which he attempts to combine the two teachings in one heresy by blending their doctrines. It must be realized however, that Lightfoot does not precisely identify this type of Gnosticism which prevailed in Colossae with the later movement which crystallized into an heretic teaching. The germinating seed thoughts were prevalent, nevertheless, in Colossae. In reconciling these two elements into one heresy Lightfoot explains of Paul that the apostle, "passes backward and forward from the one to the other in such a way as to show that they are parts of one complex whole."<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note Lightfoot's analysis of the heresy in the light of both the Essene and Gnostic influence and to discover how he blends the two. Since

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 73.

Gnosticism has been introduced as a possible solution to the heresy it may be well to sketch some of the main features of the doctrine. As the word implies, Gnostic means knowledge. This knowledge was a superior aristocratic possession of a select few which gave its adherents a superior religion than those who possessed the lowly and simple quality of faith. Those who possessed knowledge were in an exclusive class.

The second characteristic of Gnosticism was its intellectual quest for a key to the world. In this respect it can be placed alongside most Greek philosophies. Emerging from its quest of a cosmic solution came two main questions: (1) How can the work of creation be explained? (2) How did evil come to exist? As Lightfoot rightly insists, these questions have a direct bearing on one another.

If God created this world, then either God is evil or else there is some opposing tendency which thwarts and limits the Creator from making the world completely good. The conclusion was finally postulated that matter is evil. Many speculations are to be found, how matter came to be controlled by evil influence. The main point at issue, however, is to be had by asking a final question. How can a good God work or make contact with an evil world? Here is where the genius of the Gnostic movement finds its climax. God does not work with evil matter, but evolves himself by a series of aeons. Each of these aeons is a

transmitting power. Each aeon becomes more feeble as it has contact with the earth by the lowest aeon. In the author's own words he says:

Thus the Divine Being germinates, as it were; and the first germination again evolves a second from itself in like manner. In this way we obtain a series of successive emanations, which may be more or fewer, as the requirements of any particular system demand. In each successive evolution the divine element is feebler. They sink gradually lower and lower in scale, as they are removed from their source; until at length contact with matter is possible, and creation ensues.<sup>1</sup>

It must be constantly kept in mind that there cannot be a strict and formal analysis of this heresy as compared with later tendencies in the Gnostic doctrine. The error-ists at Colossae may or may not have had the same tenets as later Gnosticism. There were many varieties of Gnosticism, as Scott explains, each one differing in minor points from the other.<sup>2</sup> It is not our purpose to become too deeply involved in an examination of these numerous sects, but simply to introduce the main propositions and tenets of the doctrine; and to realize that it was a tendency in thought rather than a rigid system of teaching at the time of the Colossian heresy. "It was more a tendency than a clearly defined movement," explains Barnett, "and was characterized by variation in stages of development and concrete emphasis."<sup>3</sup>

Lightfoot leans more heavily on the Essene tendency of the heresy than he does the Gnostic teaching. This may

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>E. F. Scott, "Gnosticism" Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics ed. J. Hastings, Vol. VI, (1914).

<sup>3</sup>A. E. Barnett, The New Testament: Its Meaning and Making (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1946), p. 83.

be due to several reasons. One reason why Lightfoot marks the heresy as partially Essene is because he notes a Jewish influence in the heresy which cannot be catalogued under an orthodox Jewish custom, as represented by the Pharisees. Yet there is distinctly a Jewish element. He concludes it to be Essenism. Lightfoot thinks the primary teaching in the doctrine of the Essenes is the ascetic element. He notes that the Essenes diverged from orthodoxy by the worship of the sun; believing not in bodily resurrection, but only an immortality of the soul; offering no sacrifice at the temple; worshipping angels; speculating as to creator; having secret books and priding themselves in an exclusiveness which separated them from the main stream of Jewish civilization.<sup>1</sup> By noting these main Essene teachings and comparing them to the teaching of the errorists, it would seem that Essenism might dominate the heresy. Lightfoot takes pains to show that the Essenes lived in Asia. His sources for information, however, are more indirect than they are factual statements.<sup>2</sup>

Not only does Lightfoot mark the heresy as Essene, but he recommends a Gnostic influence be included as well. He is not so bold as to emphasize the Gnostic influence, leaving out the Essene coloring in the heresy. One reason

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., pp. 83-91

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-96.

for this might be that if he did, he would revert to the thinking of the Tübingen school which labeled the epistle a second century product because of the later dating of this heresy. Such a view is explained by Davidson, who contends that the epistle is necessarily dated after the time of Paul because of the presence of Gnostic teachings.<sup>1</sup> This school thought Gnosticism was not prevalent before the second century. Lightfoot, by assigning the heresy to the Essenes, still was able to show a Jewish faction in the heresy, and also was able to sandwich-in traces of early Gnostic teachings. He labels the heresy as a variety of Essene Gnostic Judaism.<sup>2</sup> That this Essene-Gnostic Judaism is one element, he explains by the following:

The epistle itself contains no hint that the apostle has more than one set of antagonists in view; and the needless multiplication of persons or events is always to be depreciated in historical criticism. Nor indeed does the hypothesis of a single complex heresy present any real difficulty. If the two elements seem irreconcilable, or at least congruous, at first sight, the incongruity disappears on farther examination.<sup>3</sup>

By making one party out of the seemingly two elements in the heresy, Lightfoot is able to include Gnosticism, which was thought to be much later; and yet to include the apparent leaven of Judaism.

Miller, like Lightfoot, recognizes the probability

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<sup>1</sup>S. Davidson, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament 2nd ed. rev. (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1882), Vol. II, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.

of Gnosticism in the heresy; but thinks this tendency to be Essene.<sup>1</sup> In his own words he says that, "it was a combination of Judaistic ritualism with its abstinence from meats, and the observance of certain days, with this Eastern philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Frame thinks that if early Gnosticism were the cause, Paul would not have passed over it lightly. He concludes that it was composed of Essenism, Judaism and Oriental mysticism.<sup>3</sup> Moule also holds to the theory that the heretics were Essenes.<sup>4</sup>

It is Zahn who refutes best the proposition made by Lightfoot in naming the heresy an Essene type of Gnosticism. He says that the chief reasons for doubting the absence of any Essenism are that the Essenes did not forbid the use of wine as those of Colossae; that the most characteristic elements of Essenism are absent; that the alleged angelolatry is not Essene; and that pride in circumcision and feast days were common to all Jews.<sup>5</sup> Thus Zahn does unquestionable damage to the Essene theory.

Moffatt believes that even though the errorists possessed Essene tendencies they need not necessarily be

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<sup>1</sup>A. Miller, An Introduction to the New Testament (Anderson: Gospel Trumpet Co., 1943), p. 222.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>J. Frame, "Colossians, Epistle To" Encyclopedia Britannica 11th ed., Vol. VI (1910)

<sup>4</sup>H. Moule, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 479.

Essene. He believes many Pharaisic Jews could possess these Essene tendencies; for he says, "such tendencies were prevalent at the time among many Pharaisic Jews who did not belong to that peculiar sect."<sup>1</sup>

Zahn himself does not believe the false teachers to be like the Jews mentioned in the Galatian epistle nor does he believe that they came from abroad. He says:

Of the large Jewish population in the district of Laodicea (above, p. 448, n.2), there were probably some who became members of the Christian Church in Colossae, and among these there may have been those who were ascetic in their tendencies, who had some philosophic training, and who were dissatisfied with the simple gospel preached by Epaphras, and with the resultant type of life among the Gentile Christians. Possibly there was an individual of some importance (n.9) who started the whole movement that caused Epaphras so much trouble, and that it was this that influenced Paul to send a special letter to Colossae, at the time he dispatched a circular letter of a more general character to the larger group of churches, of which this church was one.<sup>2</sup>

As Nash points out, much of the difficulty in precisely identifying the errorists is due to the conditions existing in Asia Minor at this time. In the first place, the Grecian state gods had crumbled with the result that organized Greek religion ceased. The reorganization of a new religion for the Greeks was attempted in Asia Minor. Gnosticism was the beginning of this reorganization, as found in Colossae. In the attempt to amalgamate the resi-

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<sup>1</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>T. Zahn, op. cit., p. 471.



due of the polytheistic Greek religions, there arose many differences in choosing from the many for the one. This led to a schismatic mysticism which could not be defined, because each locality offered a different situation as the results of its evaluation. On top of all this confusion, Nash points out that the first period of Jewish Christian influence came upon the scene when this religious confusion existed; and also came under consideration in the search for the reorganized religion.<sup>1</sup>

Machen attempts to explain the heresy much the same as Nash. Machen's chief contribution to the discussion is his explanation of how the eastern religions influenced the confused Asians at this time. He claims that the eastern religions caused these people to possess a cosmopolitanism, a new individualism, emperor worship, religious propaganda, a syncretism and prompted an age of redemption.<sup>2</sup>

Goodspeed does not discuss this religious upheaval in Asia Minor at length, but the presence of these tendencies listed above do temper his thinking on the subject. "Indeed," he says, "the Colossian error, as St. Paul considered it; may be thought of slanting midway between that older philosophy and its later refflorescence in Christian Gnosticism."<sup>3</sup> He styles it as a phase of Neo-Platonism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. J. Nash, "Paul the Apostle" The New Schoff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. by S. M. Jackson, Vol. VIII (1950)

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Machen, The Origin of St. Paul's Religion (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 220ff.

<sup>3</sup>E. Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 102f. <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

Barry describes the heresy as that which was the first of Gnosticism and the last of Judaism.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it was a period of formation in which Christianity became the melting pot for the religious world. Although Bacon likes to think of the heresy as a local one, dependent upon conditions in and around Colossae, he notes the attempted fusion of religions in that time by this remark: "We see in fact, the beginning of that amalgamation of Judaism with Gnosticism, which, entering perhaps by the avenue of the Essene sects was already seeking to rival or supplant Christianity in the religious conquest of the world (Tit. 1:10-16)<sup>2</sup> Bacon, like many others, realizes the influence of early Gnosticism prevalent in the heretical teaching.

Not only were there conditions in the empire which prompted this uprising, but there were also local conditions which fostered the heretical movement. As Julicher points out, we find no traces of the names of individual philosophers in South-Western Phegyn about the time of Paul, but this should not discourage investigating local conditions.<sup>3</sup> Even though the Gnosticism of this time had no known person-

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<sup>1</sup>A. Barry, The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philemon and Colossians - New Testament Commentary for English Readers, ed. C. J. Ellicott (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., n.d.) Vol. III, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>B. W. Bacon, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>Julicher, An Introduction to the New Testament, trans. Janet P. Ward (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1904), p. 135.

al proponent, it was older than the Christianity that was there.<sup>1</sup>

Moffatt supports this supposition in this manner:

The contact of Orientalism with Judaism on its speculative and popular sides in the Dispura, is independent of and prior to the use of Christianity, and the germs of what was afterwards gnosticism can be detected in various quarters during the earlier half of the first century. At any time after A. D. 40 early Christianity was upon the edge of such speculative tendencies; and while a discussion such as that of Colossae is unprecedented, so far as Paul's epistles are concerned, it is a long way from being historically a prolepsis.<sup>2</sup>

Abbott gives a general statement of religious conditions around the district when he says that, "the natural phenomena of the region about Hieropolis, Laodicea and Colossae were well calculated to encourage a belief in demoniac or angelic powers controlling the elementary force of nature."<sup>3</sup> It is not surprising to hear of angel worship existing there after realizing that Michael was the protecting angel of the city.<sup>4</sup> Machen lends further information to other religious peculiarities by these statements:

The female divinity, Atorgatis, whose temple at Hierapol~~s~~ is described by Lucian, and the male divinity Hadad of Helopol~~s~~ are among the best known of the Syrian gods. The Syrian worship was characterized by especially immoral and revolting features, but seems to have become enabled by the introduction of the Babylonian worship of the formation of the solar mono-

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.      <sup>2</sup>Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 153, 154.

<sup>3</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. XLIV

<sup>4</sup>E. B. Banks, "Colossae" op. cit.

theism which was the final form assumed by the pagan religion of the Empire before the triumph of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

Radford, who believes the heresy to be a local one, sketches below the religions of the district which may have entered into the heresy:

For the general syncretism of the Colossian heresy there were various materials present in its environment, (a) the cult of the old Phrygian moon-deity worshipped under the name of Men; (b) the oriental cults of Attis, Sabazius, and the Great Mother (Cybele), which spread far and wide through Anatolis; (c) the Egyptian theology seen in the pages of Philo the Hellenist-Jewish philosopher of Alexandria and developed later in the Hermetic-writings; (d) perhaps also the Persian cult of Mithras the hero sun-god, though this cult had not yet reached farther west than Cilicia. In all these cults there appear in varying combinations the factors noted in the Colossian heresy. Last but not least, (e) there was the Judaic contribution, e. g. circumcision, the bond of the law, the sabbath (Col. ii. 11, 14, 16).<sup>2</sup>

Scott thinks the age was one of religious experiment. He believes the heresy to have been one of a local nature involved in this experiment. An opportunity was given to every religion to donate its best to the attempted amalgamation. Scott hesitates to say whether the false teachers were Jews, Gentiles or both. At any rate, it was a combination of the residue of every religion alive in the area. He concludes that, "the Colossian heresy, therefore, is to be regarded as one of the many attempts to make Christianity an element in some form of composite religion."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Machen, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>E. F. Scott, op. cit., p. 10.

Knowing some of the conditions in and around Colossae, it is not surprising that they offered good soil in which Gnostic speculation could sprout. Barnett reminds us that this Gnosticism cannot be compared to that of the second century.<sup>1</sup> Fowler advises of the same caution.<sup>2</sup> If one does not confine his explanation of the heresy within the bounds of Judaism, then almost any Gentile influence which was prevalent in Colossae may be termed as Gnosticism.

McNeile is among the many scholars who believes that this uncrystallized Gnosticism was prevalent in the heresy.<sup>3</sup> Cartledge feels that the Gnosticism expressed in the Colossian epistle is much like that appearing in II Peter, Jude, Revelation and the Pastorals. He contends that this early Gnosticism was a universal sentiment of the times.<sup>4</sup> Enslin also believes Gnosticism to be mixed with the heresy, but he does not identify the heretics with any particular group.<sup>5</sup> Clogg patterns his view much like Enslin by not classifying the errorists.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. E. Barnett, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>H. T. Fowler The History and Literature of the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>A. McNeile op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>4</sup>S. A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 138.

<sup>5</sup>M. S. Enslin, op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>6</sup>F. B. Clogg, An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 83.

Granting that there were two elements in the heresy, Judaism and Gnosticism, there remains one additional discussion. The question arises as to whether the false teachers were Jews who adopted Gnostic tendencies, or Gentiles who were drawn to Jewish teachings. Robertson believes that, "these Gnostics in Lycus Valley were probably both Jewish and Gentile in origin, and not merely Jewish as McGiffert thinks."<sup>1</sup> Robertson, who fluently describes the heresy, thinks that there was room for both parties. If pagan Gentiles and Jews composed the constituency of the church, the situation would call for a delicate balance.

Thiessen takes the same position as does Robertson. His explanation is as follows:

Although the first element is distinctly Jewish and the second and third elements are as definitely Gnostic, the combination was given a kind of Christian coloring by the false teachers. In Galatia the error consisted of a mixture of law and grace in Colossae, of a Judaic-Gnostic perversion of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Abbott assumes that the errorists were Gentiles, since Epaphras was a Gentile. He also notes that Colossae was a Gentile city, therefore, we would expect the church to be Gentile constituency, at least in majority.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 3-20.

<sup>2</sup>H. C. Thiessen Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman's Publishing Company, 1943), p. 232.

<sup>3</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. xlviii.

If the Jews composed the minority, they would be handicapped in any attempt to lead the church, except they convert some Gentiles to their fallacies.

Pfeiffer does not lend information directly to the heresy, but he does say that Gentile adherents were attracted to the Jewish synagogue by teachings of monotheism and other teachings. However, he affirms that these Gentile adherents objected to circumcision and Jewish citizenship, therefore, never did take the required steps of true proselytes.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this information Pfeiffer says:

It was primarily among them that Paul found the early believers who constituted the nucleus of the inupent Christian Church, until converted pagans eventually became the great majority in it.<sup>2</sup>

It could very easily have been Gentiles who were in error, as well as Jews. The errorists could have been both parties with each party feeling their religion superior to the other. The whole affair may have begun with a disagreement among certain members, growing to the point where Christianity became subdued, the argument being which party had the better religion before entering the church. Of course, this is stretching the imagination; but it is one of the many possibilities of answering the cause of the heresy. No one knows the exact conditions which prompted Paul to write.

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<sup>1</sup>R. H. Pfeiffer, A History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1949), p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

In concluding this study it might be well to name the scholars who have mentioned and what views they hold, so as to see where the weight of thought leans. The first possible solution to the heresy was that it was entirely due to Jewish influence. These who hold to this view have various shades of thought, yet can be classified under this head. Erdman, Peake and Lewis held to the theory that the heresy was primarily of a Jewish nature. Conybeare and Hawson, McGiffert and Williams believe the Jewish heretics to have come from abroad. Conybeare and Hawson, also McGiffert, identify them as Alexandrian Jews. Williams identifies them as Colossian Jews who were influenced by Persian religion and the Phrygian mysteries. Lightfoot, Miller, Frame, and Moule think that the heresy was Essene in its nature.

The scholars just quoted lean toward a Jewish solution to the heresy. However, most of them admit that if the Jews were to blame, it is possible to include the outward forces of their environment as having a bearing upon their thought and action. In other words, as Williams very plainly indicates, these Jews were tempered by pagan forces.<sup>1</sup> Even if we were to assume they were Alexandrian Jews or Essenes, we would have to postulate a philosophy among them; for philosophy is mentioned as one of the evils in the heresy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. xxxii

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:8.



This indicates that there was some speculation besides the tenets of the legalism prescribed by the Jewish law, else Paul would have penned this letter much like he did that to the Galatians.

Almost all contemporary scholars admit that the seed germs of Gnosticism are in the heresy. Not only do they admit this fact; but since the type of Gnosticism is not known, they are prone to admit that it was a local condition which existed in and around Colossae. This seems to be the best position, for the Gnosticism which existed at this time was like a running stream of water which was on its way to the gulf. We cannot tell at what stage it passed Colossae.

About all scholars can say is that we find traces of Judaism and Gnosticism in the heresy. The thinkers who take this viewpoint do not speculate as to a precise identity of the heretics, but simply say it was certainly in Colossae. Among the more prominent scholars we have noted who hold to this view are Allen and Grensted, Abbott, Bacon, Barnett, Barry, Cartledge, Clogg, Enslin, Erdman, Lake, McNiele, Moffatt, Machen, Miller, Robertson, Radford, Scott, Theissen, and Zahn.<sup>1</sup>

The Colossian heresy is not a fully settled question, nor is it a dull question. Modern research may discover a completely new twist to the solution of the problem.

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<sup>1</sup>See Bibliography for book listings.

Even though this is the conclusion to the chapter, it is not a conclusion to the problem involved; because the problem is not a settled issue. We know that both Judaism and an incipient Gnosticism entered into the heresy at Colossae. The more precise conclusion is left in the hands of future scholarship.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND CONTENTS

Before proceeding with the intended discussion of this chapter, as indicated by the chapter heading, some specific aims and intentions should first be outlined briefly. By doing this, the reader is prepared to understand the intent and purpose in the treatment of the text. So, in the few statements to follow, it is hoped that the plan and method of study will be explained. These statements will attempt to explain how the text will be treated, an explanation for the method of treatment and the plan which will be followed in the course of this chapter.

The best way to explain how the text will be studied in this discussion is to first tell how it will not be studied. Following this explanation, a statement will be given as to what to expect in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is not to produce an exhaustive commentary or an involved and complicated explanation of every word appearing in the epistle. Explanations of sections, sentences, phrases and words will be treated; but only those which seem most important. Nothing relevant to the foregoing study should be omitted, yet in becoming too deeply involved in a thorough examination of every word, the main trend of thought and the overall picture will be lost. Then too, it is not the purpose of this chapter to give an exhaustive study of the con-

tents of this letter. If unlimited space were given to commentaries and critical reviews on this epistle, the chapter never would be finished. Because of necessity some limitations must be overlooked, for it is difficult to know to what degree the reader expects this or that word or phrase to be treated. In attempting to deal with the contents of the epistle in one chapter, the best method of study was adopted. This chapter explains and clarifies the foregoing problems, especially the one on the heresy. Then too, this chapter is responsible for the body of the epistle. In the analysis of the epistle, an outline of the book will be presented so that an overall view of the letter can be gotten. Thus the outline will aid in forming a mental image of the contents. After a brief analysis of the epistle has been presented, a more thorough discussion will be given, especially observing the importance and purpose of certain words and sentences in the epistle as they relate to the conditions under which the letter was written. More attention will be given to the sections which seem more vital in relation to the heresy at Colossae, than those sections which are not as important to the understanding of the main trend of thought in the letter.

The letter will be treated as it is found in the New Testament canon. There are some scholars who would eliminate much of the doctrinal sections of the epistle, especially those statements relating to the position of Christ and those seemingly combating the gnostic teaching. For instance, Hawkins

eliminates 2:1-7, as non-Pauline, and disregards much of 2:8-3:17, which he thinks to be corrupted by later insertions. Thus he omits almost all verses containing doctrinal teaching, leaving only a few verses on ethics and personal greetings.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have wondered about 1:15-20, primarily because of its faulty connection with the context. It seems to be hinged onto the preceeding statements instead of smoothly fitting itself into the text.<sup>2</sup>

So far, the existing manuscripts afford no evidence of extreme corruption in our present text. Since this is the case, most scholars, especially those who have written commentaries on the epistle, regard the entire work as Pauline. There is no way of judging what verses are non-Pauline. Even those who do suspect corruption in the text proceed to outline and explain the epistle in its present form. Until concrete evidence is produced for scholarship, the text will necessarily be regarded as it is. Until then, the more time consumed in explaining it away, rather than undertaking an explanation of it, seems to be futile.

#### OUTLINES OF THE EPISTLE

Each scholar has his own outline of the epistle, but

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<sup>1</sup>R. M. Hawkins, The Recovery of the Historical Paul (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1943), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>J. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 156.

little variance is found in marking off the sections of the epistle. Many of the variations in outlining the epistle are due to the abrupt break in the prayer, the next sentence beginning a doctrinal treatise about Christ. However, there are possible explanations for this which will be noted upon discussion of that section. The skeleton outline of the epistle should not be too complicated, so an attempt will be made to divide the epistle into sections or parts. There are various ways of naming the divisions of the epistle, each depending upon what variety of study one has in mind. Before beginning with the main body of the outline, the introductory material in the epistle should first be noted. Since the introductory material will be more fully discussed in the contents only a brief sketch of it will be given here.

Colossians is introduced by the usual personal salutation of the writer which accompanied most letters of that time.<sup>1</sup> Following this brief salutation, Paul immediately recognizes and pays tribute to his readers at Colossae, being thankful that at least they had received his gospel through Epaphras and had commenced their Christian life.<sup>2</sup> Thus far, the progress of these Christians was excellent, but existing conditions may blight their future. Thus Paul reverts to the most effective means he could use among them, since he had not visited nor known them; that of prayer for

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:3-8.

them. Being an apostle, knowing Christ as none of them, wanting them to know the content of his prayer to Christ, Paul inserts his prayer that he has uttered on their behalf. Because the prayer has no definite ending, but shifts into the great doctrine concerning the position of Christ, there is some disagreement in its termination. One is reading the prayer as it ascends in thought and feeling, when all of a sudden the thought changes, and one finds himself in the midst of a doctrinal discussion about Christ. This section may have been written hoping that the reader would experience this very thing. Then too, possibly Paul wanted his readers to regard his remarks as they would an answer to prayer. In this case almost the entire epistle could be regarded as such. Then again, the difficulty may be due to the scribe who could not so readily write as Paul could talk, thus leaving some jagged edges here and there. It may be well to note at what verse some scholars terminate the prayer, since there seems to be no apparent ending in the text. Lightfoot terminates it at verse 13.<sup>1</sup> Radford marks the division at verse 14.<sup>2</sup> Lenski marks it as Radford, giving this explanation: "In the section v. 3-14 the 'we' is predominant; v. 15-20 is entirely about Christ, who has already been called 'the Son of the Father's love,' the King of the Kingdom (v. 13)."<sup>3</sup> Scott like-

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<sup>1</sup>J. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>L. Radford, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>R. Lenski, op. cit., p. 47.

wise terminates the prayer at verse 14.<sup>1</sup> Robertson also designates the end as verse 14.<sup>2</sup> So either verses 13 or 14 may be designated as the termination of Paul's prayer, with verse 14 being preferable. Since the prayer itself contains doctrinal implications, there is little damage done in the selection of either of these two verses.

Although most scholars divide the epistle into the same divisions, each one places his own tag of identification in naming the various sections. Probably the most simple way of sectioning the epistle is to divide it into the doctrinal, ethical and personal parts. If this outline were followed the doctrinal section is found in 1:15-2:3. The ethical section follows in 2:4-4:6. The personal section concludes the epistle. This outline is short and easily remembered. Lightfoot outlines the epistle into the doctrinal section, 1:13-2:3; the polemical section, 2:4-3:4; the hortatorical section, 3:5-4:6; and the personal section, 4:7-18.<sup>3</sup> This is an excellent way to sketch the epistle. Thiessen employs this same outline, only he lists the third section as practical instead of hortatorical.<sup>4</sup>

As Radford outlines the epistle, he keeps in mind the heretical problem involved in the writing of the letter. He calls his first main division of the epistle Christ the true

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<sup>1</sup>E. Scott, "The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians," op. cit., p. 17

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., pp. 124-126.

<sup>4</sup>H. C. Thiessen, op. cit., p. 234.



mystery, 1:15-2:7. He believes the next division is a contrast of the false mystery to the true mystery, 2:8-3:4. The next section he calls a contrast between the old life and the new 3:5-4:6. The last is designated as converts and comrades 4:7-18.<sup>1</sup>

Since it is next to impossible to present every scholar's outline that has been consulted, only one more outline will be given. This outline will be representative of those who sketch the epistle more specifically. Robertson presents several main points to keep in mind when analyzing the epistle. They are the preeminence of Christ, 1:15-20; the change from heathen to Christian, 1:21-23; the mystery of God in Christ made manifest, 1:24-2:5; the triumph on the cross, 2:6-19; death to ritualistic dogmatism, 2:20-3:4; the new man in Christ exalted, 3:15-17; social obligations of the new man in Christ, 3:18-4:1; and matters personal 4:2-18.<sup>2</sup>

Having presented several skeleton outlines of the epistle, a detailed outline presents a more thorough analysis of the epistle, and sets the stage for the next section of discussion. In the next section of discussion, that of an examination of the contents, the explanation will show how these intricate parts of the epistle logically fit together. This outline will also serve as a guide for the explanation of certain passages that will be given, so as to elucidate

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., pp. 77-83.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. xi.

their pertinency to the problem involved in writing. It is clear then, that this outline to be given will form the basis for the remaining discussion and explanation of the epistle.

The purpose of almost any outline, as the word indicates, is to form an outer edge around the content so that the content itself will stand out more vividly. So, it is the purpose of this outline to summarize, clarify, and sketch; so that the contents of this epistle might become like a mental picture in the mind of the reader. This outline will be one of a personal nature, not being copied from any one authority. However, where other outlines have entered into the making of this outline, credit will be given to these sources. The outlines and explanations of commentators will play a more important part in the examination of the contents.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE

The epistle seems best divided into sections concerning doctrine, ethics and reports. The reports, which deal with information concerning Paul's fellow workmen, were somewhat discussed in the latter part of the first chapter. Therefore, the two remaining sections concerning doctrine and ethics will occupy the discussion. The reason for selecting these two divisions is one of logical explanation. Their conception of Christ had become thwarted due to intervening influences. The misunderstanding in thinking led to an erroneous ethical system. What they thought conditioned how they lived. Thus if Paul

could first clarify their misapprehensions about Christ, then he could refute with authority their vain system of ethics.

The first division in the body of the epistle is labeled doctrine.<sup>1</sup> This section contains first, the affirmative teaching that should be known by the Colossians. It then proceeds to show the futility of the errorists in comparison to the truth. In the affirmative teaching, the apostle presents his case by the inductive method. He first shows the preeminence of Christ specifically in relation to God, to all creation, to all existence, to the church; and generally, in relation to everything.<sup>2</sup> Christ is preeminent in relation to God, for He is the image of God; to all creation, for He is the creator; to the church, for He is its head by virtue of being its first form from the dead. Since Christ is supreme, He could deal with the problem of man's alienation from God. He did by the giving Himself on the cross. Since God has made Christ over all things, this offering has satisfied God in relation to man's sin.<sup>3</sup>

Paul now applies the reconciliation affected by Christ to the Colossians. They too, by virtue of their faith, are sharers with Christ. However, there is a conditional clause. The condition of their sharing depended upon whether they continued in the gospel which was first preached to them;

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:15-2:15.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:15-18.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:19,20.

being told to them probably by Epaphras, yet originally belonging to Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is then led to speak more about his gospel, especially his labors and trials connected with it. This section seems to be parenthetical, but it is definitely connected with the main discussion of the letter. In this section Paul accomplishes several things which have a bearing on the next section of the epistle. In the first place Paul speaks of his ministry as a ministry of suffering for the church, in this case for the Colossians. The purpose of this ministry, as Paul's divine office was received, was to make fully known the word of God.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of making the word of God fully known, as he had tried to do especially among the Gentiles, was to teach them the hope of glory, being Christ in them; and to present every person full grown in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Thus Paul has authority for speaking, for he has a divine office. He has a purpose in speaking, for his office consists in making the Gentiles, thus the Colossians, fully established in Christ. Thus their problem becomes his problem by this office.

Paul had never been to Colossae. Thus he devotes space in telling them how he does have interest in them by this divine office. In the first place he tells them how

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:21-23.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:24-26.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:27-28.

that he strives for them, that their insight into the true riches of Christ might be strengthened.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of his office, this appeal carries with it much voice. Even though Paul was not in their midst to enforce this wish bodily, he lets them know that he was with them in spirit.<sup>2</sup> As he rejoiced in his sufferings for their sake, so would he rejoice in their firmness in Christ for his sake.<sup>3</sup> Paul's presence must have been forceful, especially when he came to correct an error, for after telling them of his presence with them in spirit he issues an affirmative command which says:

As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.<sup>4</sup>

After this injunction, Paul exposes the fallacy of the false teaching. The Colossians are to disregard this prevailing false philosophy and vain talk for it is of human tradition and elementary. Most of all, it is not according to Christ.<sup>5</sup> In Christ dwells the whole system of philosophy, and since they dwelt in him, they had already come to fullness of life.<sup>6</sup> Not only is philosophy fulfilled in Christ, but circumcision finds its real meaning, thus its fullness in Christ.<sup>7</sup> Evidently the rite of circumcision was being made essential for Christians, even after they had entered the church. Paul tells them they had already been circumcised.

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:1-3.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:5.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:5.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:6-7.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 2:8.

<sup>6</sup>Colossians 2:10.

<sup>7</sup>Colossians 2:11,12.

Their putting off the filth of the flesh, which was represented by the Jewish rite, was already accomplished by their baptism into Christ. That is, they were buried with Christ, thus putting off the flesh; but over and above circumcision, they were raised with Christ through their faith in God.<sup>1</sup> Being raised, they were yet alive with Christ to God. God had forgiven them, and they were alive by virtue of Christ. Even circumcision could not accomplish this, nor could all the law. As did everything else, the law was fulfilled in Christ, and, therefore, not binding.<sup>2</sup> As is everything else, so is not only circumcision, but the whole law fulfilled in Christ.

Then if all this be so, the ethical system as propounded by the law and the rudimentary philosophy would crumble. It remained Paul's task not only to explain why the false ethical system is worthless but to explain true Christian ethics in the light of these false conceptions. This section composes the second main division of the epistle, and logically follows the section on doctrine. Paul had taught them what to believe, and now he sets forth the manner of life based on that belief. Even though it may seem elementary, the Christian world of today has not reached the state of practicing many of the ethical ideals set forth in this short discussion.<sup>3</sup>

Since Paul has shown that the law has been nullified,

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:11,12.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:14.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:16-4:6.

he now begins his treatise on ethics by telling the Colossians to disregard criticisms when they did not observe food laws, festival seasons or the Sabbath; for these were only a shadow of the real. This real is Christ.<sup>1</sup> He then sets about to disqualify the ethical provisions made by philosophy. They are to disregard self-abasement and the worship of angels.<sup>2</sup> Still referring to the elemental spirits, which he earlier connected with philosophy, Paul warns the Colossians against their restraint of handling, tasting or touching certain kinds of material objects, probably food.<sup>3</sup> These might check the body, claims Paul, and the whole system even sounds good. However, these rules concerning the body do not necessarily check the indulgence of the flesh.<sup>4</sup> Only a renewed mind can control the body. The Christian has this new mind in Christ. These ascetic rules did nothing for the inner man.

After disqualifying these false ethical teachings the apostle presents the true way of life for them. He does this by general summarizations. From there he proceeds to explain that which should be negative in their life; then, that which is positive. He concretely illustrates his case by explaining how individual members of a Christian family should conduct its life.

Immediately following the section which shows that

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:17.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:18.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:21.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 2:23.

regulations pertaining to the body concern only the body, Paul explains the Christians' conduct. Since they had been raised with Christ and were alive to God, they were to activate their minds in that higher realm of spiritual life in Christ. They should not regard regulations for the body, for their bodies were already as dead; because they had buried them by means of baptism. Their spirits were alive with the living Christ, because they had been raised with Him in the act of baptism.<sup>1</sup>

If their bodies were dead, they were to put to death all things earthly in them. Paul's list of these earthly activities includes immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness.<sup>2</sup> These will bring the wrath of God.<sup>3</sup> Following this list Paul gives a minor list which includes anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk.<sup>4</sup> Foul talk also includes lying, which probably was not an uncommon practice.<sup>5</sup> They must realize that they had put off their old nature, which probably thrived on falsehood, and put on the new nature. This new nature must be continually charged with truthful knowledge from its fountainhead, Christ, who was the source of their life.<sup>6</sup> Then follows Paul's famous statement that there cannot be discrimination of races, nationalities, classes, but that Christ is all and in all.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 3:2,3.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 3:5.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 3:6.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 3:8.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 3:8

<sup>6</sup>Colossians 3:10.

<sup>7</sup>Colossians 3:11.



Paul then proceeds to list some positive injunctions which should serve as a guide to the Christian's life. In short, he urges them to have Christian harmony in their midst. This can only be done by a humble and forgiving attitude, with Christian love being the binding force.<sup>1</sup> The peace of Christ ruling in them would keep them united.<sup>2</sup> The word of Christ is to be their motive for church activity. In fact, Paul makes it the motive for all activity. No matter what was to be done or said, it was to be accomplished by the working of Christ in them.<sup>3</sup> Paul's one word highlighting his doctrine and ethics was Christ. They needed nothing else for He was all sufficient.

A concrete case illustrating how the Christian family should live concludes his section on ethics, with exception of one or two general remarks. Wives are to be subject to their husbands.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand husbands are to love their wives, and treat them gently.<sup>5</sup> As for children, they are to obey their parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, fathers should not provoke their children.<sup>7</sup> Since slavery was an established institution in Paul's time, and since the case of Onesimus loomed on the surface, Paul had something to say of slaves. They were to do their work accordingly, for their reward would ultimately come from the Lord, and if any wrong was done in the process of their labor punish-

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 3:12-14.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 3:15.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 3:16-17.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 3:18.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 3:19.

<sup>6</sup>Colossians 3:20.

<sup>7</sup>Colossians 3:21.

ment would be meted out to the wrongdoer.<sup>1</sup> Christian masters, who owned servants or slaves, were not to forget that in their treatment of slaves they too had a master in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Paul then seems to feel more relaxed about the matter in Colossae, for he begins to generalize about conditions. He asks them to pray, especially for him for preaching.<sup>3</sup> He then thinks of an injunction he may have omitted; that of their conduct toward outsiders. He admonishes them to make the most of their time, to let their speech be gracious so that they may answer every graciously yet with the possibility of influencing them for Christ.<sup>4</sup>

The apostle does not resume his discussion about himself following the insertion of this advice, but rather refers them to the coming of Tychicus, who will bear news of his activities. This leads him to list others who were associated with him, and who would be of interest to the church.<sup>5</sup> This section has been discussed in Chapter I. The closing verse of the epistle will be noted in the discussion regarding the contents.

#### THE CONTENTS

Having given a brief analysis of the epistle, so as to form a mental picture of the entire contents, a detailed

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 3:22-25.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 4:1.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 4:2-4.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 4:5,6.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 4:7-17.

examination of the letter will be given. The foregoing analysis given will form the framework for the support of the remaining discussion. The difference between this section, dealing with the contents, and the section giving the analysis is that this latter study will be a more detailed examination of the sections which were indicated in the analysis. Commentaries, especially, will afford the bulk of information in this section on the contents. It is noted here that since it is impossible to use every commentary consulted in the study of every verse, only the most noted authors will be used. Out of these, the one who yields the best information to each particular study, and the one who displays the most skill in an explanation of the meaning of certain linguistical terms will be given the precedence over the others.

The study of the contents will begin with a more thorough study of the introduction of the epistle.<sup>1</sup> Paul begins his letter by introducing himself as the writer. This type of introduction was the usual way of beginning a letter in that time.<sup>2</sup> However, Paul, in designating himself as an apostle of Christ by God, flavors the opening with a distinctly Christian greeting. Even though Paul did designate himself as an apostle of Christ, it is doubtful whether his

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:1-14.

<sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 129.

apostleship was a matter of question among his readers. The language, at least, is not as sharp here as in his Galatian epistle which was written to those who disputed his authority.<sup>1</sup> Peake notes that the reason by the explanation of himself was due to the fact that he was probably unknown among his readers.<sup>2</sup> No doubt, the letter carries more influence by this salutation. It is one of the reasons why its authenticity is accepted.

Paul also includes Timothy in his introduction, naming him as "our brother."<sup>3</sup> Williams notes that in all Paul's letters save the Pastorals, Romans and Ephesians, Timothy is mentioned in the greeting.<sup>4</sup> The definite article with the word "brother" limits this latter word to the realm of Christian fellowship.<sup>5</sup> Paul is not referring to an official position held by Timothy, but uses the word in its warmest and highest meaning in relation to Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Paul addresses the letter "to the saints and faithful brethern in Christ at Colossae."<sup>7</sup> This phrase has given rise to quite a discussion as to the intended meaning conveyed by the words, "saints", "faithful brethern" and "in Christ". In the first place, Paul does not address them as a church. In the second place, two substantives are used to describe

<sup>1</sup>Galatians 1:1.

<sup>2</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:1.

<sup>4</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>7</sup>Colossians 1:2.

them. By calling them saints, Paul did not denote a special group which possessed eminent virtues, but he used the word to denote those who belonged to God. The conjecture is over the use of the term "faithful brethern". Saints denoted their relation to God, while brethern denoted their relation to one another. The word "faithful" is the stumbling block. Lightfoot thinks the term "faithful" was used as an injected reminder for those who were questioning Paul's gospel.<sup>1</sup> They were in Christ, and they were brethern to each other, and to Paul by virtue of his gospel. Paul does not address them as a church, because some who were in the church had fallen away from the truth. Thus it might read, "to the pure and faithful in Christ". The article is not used in the second substantive, thus these two qualities belong to the same group.<sup>2</sup> Radford thinks this type of explanation to be too drastic. He notes the following:

But (1) it is surely a forced rendering to take 'faithful brethern' as a narrowing down of 'the saints' to those who are remaining true to the faith; the two terms bracketed by the one article must be co-extensive. (2) The use of 'faithful' in Ephesians 1:1 rules out any such hint. There is the counterpart of saints; why not here also? It is unlikely that St. Paul would use 'faithful' in different senses in two letters written at the same time to partly identical destinations.<sup>3</sup>

However, it seems out of the ordinary that Paul would

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 47.

address other earlier letters to the churches and not this one.<sup>1</sup> Even if he did establish it, he recognized it as a church or he would not have bothered to send a letter to them. Lightfoot does have some grounds for his theory. However, Radford staunchly maintains that the salutation at best can only designate greetings to Christians who lived at Colossae. Beyond this, he can see no hint of heresy involved in the salutation.<sup>2</sup>

The customary greeting of "grace to you and peace" was a common one in the Greek speaking world. Paul does one thing to this phrase. He uses the same root for the word "grace" but he substitutes  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$  for  $\chi\alpha\rho\epsilon\bar{\iota}\nu$ . Paul is given credit for embellishing this former word in Christianity, and giving it a sense of value in relation to God, much like he did the word  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ . The word  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$  comes to mean God's favor. Coupled with the Hebrew word  $\text{ד'זש}$ . Thus the translation, "grace and peace to you from God the Father". Some manuscripts add, "and from the Lord Jesus Christ", although it seems to be a later insertion to doctor the letter so as to sound even more like Paul. There seems to be no theological import in the omission of the phrase here.<sup>3</sup>

The next section in the introductory material of the letter concerns Paul's thanksgiving for his readers.<sup>4</sup> All the

<sup>1</sup>Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:3-8.

epistles bearing Paul's name begin with a thanksgiving except Galatians. It was no mere convention of Paul to begin his letters with thanksgiving. It does reveal his spirit. Paul realized the grace of God, both to himself and to the Colossians. Upon this grace he never could cease elaborating. Not only was he thankful to God for Christ, but he was thankful that the Colossians had become partakers in Christ and had started toward Christian perfection. His thanksgiving to God in behalf of the Colossians also places the readers in a mental activity which prepares them for the reception of the remaining message.

There has been some contention as to what Paul meant in saying, "we always thank God."<sup>1</sup> Did Paul mean by "we" he and Timothy, or was it a general expression? In all probability he is thinking of not only Timothy, but all of his companions who labored with him in prayer for other churches as well as in work.<sup>2</sup> The phrase, "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" sometimes reads, "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>3</sup> Abbott gives a list of these manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> Robertson points out that the best manuscripts omit "and."<sup>5</sup>

The idea conveyed in the statement concerning Paul's praying for the Colossians is that we give thanks for you al-

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:3.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

ways when we pray for you.<sup>1</sup> Paul's thanksgiving is founded on the report he had received of them through Epaphras. Paul demonstrates his triad of virtues here for this thanksgiving is on the grounds of their faith in Christ, of the love they have for all the saints and of the hope they have in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Their faith acts by their concept in Christ. Their Christian love which binds them to one another is the result of their oneness in Christ by the working of faith. Hope is the incentive which encourages their hearts. Lightfoot thinks Paul gives thanks for he has already heard of these virtues among them.<sup>3</sup> Lenski, on the other hand, believes that the possibilities of their faith, love and hope were being threatened by the false teachers. If this happened, Paul could no longer give thanks for them.<sup>4</sup> This does not seem likely.

These Colossians had heard of this hope in the word of truth, the gospel. This hope was not novel to the Colossians for they had heard of it before this time. Paul says,

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world bearing fruit and growing - so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth.<sup>5</sup>

The phrase, "before in the word of truth, the gospel", refers to the preaching of Epaphras. This gospel he knows will be contrasted with their presented Gnostic teaching.<sup>6</sup> Epaphras

<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:3-5.      <sup>3</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit., p. 21.      <sup>5</sup>Colossians 1:5b,6.

<sup>6</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 40.



had been their faithful minister in giving them the gospel.<sup>1</sup> The inference may be that he did not give them all they had now as the gospel; that this which they had not given to them by Epaphras was not part of the truth and that there need be no further truth needed than that which Epaphras had given them. By reaching the metropolitan areas Paul and others had been able to reach the entire world with the gospel.<sup>2</sup> This gospel is bearing fruit and growing. As Lightfoot explains:

More lurks under these words than appears on the surface. The true Gospel, the Apostle seems to say, proclaims its truth by its universality. The false gospels are the outgrowths of local circumstances of special idiosyncrasies; the true Gospel is the same everywhere. The false gospels address themselves to limited circles; the true Gospel proclaims itself boldly throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>

Paul doubles back on the Colossians. This gospel which was given to them and which was the one universally preached, so among them, thus far, was bearing fruit and growing.<sup>4</sup> In this indirect way, Paul shows how insignificant and worthless any gospel can be in relation to the true one which Epaphras had so faithfully given them and which was sanctioned by the apostle.

Paul then reveals his prayer for them. He was describing and demonstrating how he was praying for them. We pray because we need. Paul prayed for the needs of the

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:7.      <sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 132f.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:9-14.

Colossians and they needed to be confirmed in the true gospel as given to them by Epaphras. "Thanksgiving leads on to intercession."<sup>1</sup> Paul is thus far thankful for the Colossians. Now he proceeds to pray that their need might be supplied in order that they might continue in the way which Paul had previously described in his thanksgiving. The "we" section appears in the prayer as did in the thanksgiving.<sup>2</sup> Paul prays that they might "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."<sup>3</sup> The "knowledge of his will" implies a higher knowledge than that they already possessed.<sup>4</sup> This word for knowledge appears frequently in the later writings of Paul. They then would see the futility of the false teaching among them. Then too, they would be fortified against any such erroneous doctrine which was not according to the will of God. Robertson says that the way to climb above the false gnosticism was to have a higher conception of the true knowledge which comes from God.<sup>5</sup>

Radford lends additional information to this word of knowledge as appears here. He claims that the word used here, <sup>2</sup>ἐπίγνωσις, is knowledge directed toward a particular object, while γνῶσις is the wider use of the term. Radford says, "the knowledge here in question is knowledge not merely of

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:9.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:9b-b.

<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 47.

the nature but of the will of God."<sup>1</sup> Abbott says of this  $\epsilon\pi\iota\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in comparison with  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  that the former, "implies a more active exercise of a faculty, and hence lends itself better to the expression of practical knowledge."<sup>2</sup> This knowledge was to be exercised as the will of God.<sup>3</sup> This objective knowledge of the will of God was in contrast to the abstract knowledge taught by philosophy.

This "knowledge of his will", is "in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."<sup>4</sup> These two latter words pertaining to knowledge are frequently found together especially in Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon and Greek speculative thought.<sup>5</sup> Wisdom implies the moral apprehension of knowledge, while understanding denotes the ability to apply this moral apprehension to particular problems.<sup>6</sup> Paul is here urging the true wisdom and understanding which is found in Christ, in comparison to the philosophic wisdom which was a part of the gnostic teaching, and which pretended to stand aloof from the primary truth in Christ. All wisdom and spiritual understanding should bring them closer to Christ instead of leading them away from Him, for in Him is all wisdom and understanding.

This knowledge was for the purpose of living a finer Christian life. This wisdom and understanding, when applied

<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>C. R. Erdman, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:9. <sup>5</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 136f.

<sup>6</sup>C. R. Erdman, op. cit., p. 41.

to life would yield its results in pleasing the Lord, bearing fruit and the further increase of knowledge. In other words, knowledge could not be had by spinning philosophical systems away from Christ, but the development of a life further into Christ. "If the Colossians are full of knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, this walk will be worthy of the Lord Jesus."<sup>1</sup> As Scott explains: "The Colossians had been carried away by mere human wisdom and had missed the guidance of the spirit. He warns them that right knowledge is necessary to right conduct."<sup>2</sup> Since the verb "walking" appears in the aorist, it implies that this walk is final. They were to walk once for all by this spiritual knowledge.<sup>3</sup> There are no higher philosophic systems that should detour this walk onto other paths. This course of life, the worthy walk, will please the Lord. The results of this walk are "fruit bearing in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."<sup>4</sup> "By their fruits you shall know them."<sup>5</sup> The latter phrase, being the instrumental dative, could read, "by the knowledge of God."<sup>6</sup>

In Paul's intercession for them he has asked that they might have true wisdom and right conduct. He now prays that

<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>E. F. Scott, "The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians," op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:10b.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 7:20.

<sup>6</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 137.

the Colossians might be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy."<sup>1</sup> "The possession of this power will make the Colossians impregnable against the follies and fancies of the Gnostics."<sup>2</sup> This power is radiated from God, not from man. They were to be strengthened with all needed strength so that they might have endurance and longsuffering, ever being joyful because they knew God had transported them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light by Christ's reconciliation.

It is commonly known that in the Greek thought this world was thought of as a world of darkness. Systems were invented so as to transport believers in a mystic flight into the realms of light, being the spiritual world. The gnostic teachings among the Colossians was attempting to do this very thing by ascetic practices and bodily restraint.<sup>3</sup> With their systems of aeons, Christ was considered only as one of the aeons. Since He was fleshly He was considered as only the introduction to higher aeons which were not fleshly. If one could rid himself entirely of all fleshly surroundings, he could take a mystic flight, climbing from aeon to aeon until God was reached. The aeons were like a chain beginning with God and reaching to the earth. Each aeon had its realm of

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:11

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:18, 20-23.

activity. Since Christ came to earth, His realm of endeavor was located to earth. Thus He was only the introduction to the aeon chain.<sup>1</sup> Paul, however, says differently. God has already transported us into his kingdom of light from the darkness of this world. The sole vehicle of this transportation was Christ. We have been spiritually illuminated because we have redemption and forgiveness of sins in Christ. In accepting Christ, one has not only been introduced to the higher spiritual realm; but he has already been potentially transported into the kingdom of light.<sup>2</sup>

How could Christ do this? The section on doctrine now begins.<sup>3</sup> Paul tells them of the relation of Christ to God, to creation and to the church. Christ was not a fleshly angel or aeon, but was the very representation of God.<sup>4</sup> He is the first born of all creation. Thus any system of aeons would now be worthless, because if the Colossians had Christ, they were already above every conceivable aeon.<sup>5</sup> Christ was not the lowest aeon, but was the first born, the highest of all. There were no systems of aeons to produce creation, for in Christ have all things been created. In fact, all things have been created through him and for him. "He undoubtedly has the angelic aeons in mind and places Christ before in time and superior in rank to them, but he covers also the whole range of created beings."<sup>6</sup> Even though Paul may have

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:15, 2:15.      <sup>4</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op.cit., p.143.

<sup>5</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 62.      <sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 63.

borrowed some thoughts from Alexandrian theology, coined largely by Philo, he uses these conceptions to enforce the truth.<sup>1</sup>

Christ, being before all creation, thus could have part in creation. The main thought of Paul seems to be that Christ was the sole channel through which God worked; not only in redemption, but in creation and the sustenance of that creation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the universe continues to cohere in Christ. It is not the purpose of this study to present the theological implications involved, but simply to note the importance of the statement to the problem at hand. Whatever the theological import here, the main point to be made is that Paul was trying to explain a Christo-centric universe.<sup>3</sup> God has been fit to channel these activities of creation through Christ. There are many implications in this section which are fathomless in their explanation. The thought of Paul is comprehended, but the explanation of it has been going on among scholars for centuries. Radford writes a section on the Christology of Paul.

As Christ is the head of all creation by virtue of being the first born of all creation, so is Christ the head of the church by virtue of being its first-born from the dead.<sup>4</sup> Evidently the gnostics did not think Christ as the

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., pp. 171-175.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:18.

head of the church but only an introduction to the head. Being the head He directly gives its life. The life of the church was not in emanations or higher powers, but in the one who had occasioned it by being the first-born from the dead. Since He was its first-born, in relation to the church, He stood in direct relation to it with no other powers or aeons intervening between Him and it. Since Christ was Lord of physical creation, He also had the power to be directly related to His spiritual creation as a head is to a body, without any external connections.<sup>1</sup> Thus He becomes preeminent in all things; of the world that was, of the world that is and of the world that will be. In Christ then, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Christ did not possess only a fraction of God's activity as the Gnostics supposed; but He possessed all the fullness. The systems of angels and generating aeons are then destroyed. In Christ is contained all the power through which God exercises his will. He is not one on the scale of aeons who disperses the power of God, but in Him is contained the totality of any activity of God. The term *πλήρωμα* has caused conjecture in theological circles. Pertaining to our study Radford notes:

It was probably familiar to them as a technical term in the teaching of the Colossian syncretists, though they regarded this fullness as residing not

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<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 72.



in Christ, or in Christ alone, but in the 'elements', i. e., the celestial powers.<sup>1</sup>

Radford gives a scholarly discussion on the *Παύλου*.<sup>2</sup>

Since every activity of God can be found in Christ, so also can the reconciliation of man to God be found in Him. This reconciliation was made possible by His death on the cross. Christ alone had been given power to enact this reconciliation. In all probability the heretics in Colossae regarded Christ only an introductory process to reconciliation. The more perfect reconciliation would come by a release from the body and a mystic flight into the higher spiritual spheres. Paul wants them to know that reconciliation too had its totality in Christ. He is to be God's totality in reconciliation as He was in everything else. Then too, this enforces Paul's idea of Christ as the head of the church. Christ was the head of the church by virtue of His resurrection, by possessing the fullness of God, by enacting the reconciliation and by offering Himself as a means of the reconciliation. Paul's train of argument usually is from the crucifixion to the resurrection, but here it is the opposite. He had to make them see who Christ was before he could make them appreciate what He did for them.<sup>3</sup> Since Christ was the representation of all heavenly powers, He alone was responsible for their reconciliation. For a

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 183f.

<sup>3</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 52.

fuller discussion on reconciliation Radford should be consulted.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "in earth and heaven" is obscured by the change in thought of our modern day. It may have been that the errorists at Colossae thought of the earth as evil but of heaven as the realm of sinlessness. At least they attempted to free themselves from this world by bodily exercises of restraint. Paul may be telling them that all things, whether material or spiritual have been combined in Christ, who has reconciled all things. Paul does not refute the false teachers on their grounds, but climbs higher than even their systems are able to reach. Abbott has an extensive discussion upon this phrase.<sup>2</sup>

After Paul explains the work of Christ in reconciliation he gives direct address to the Colossians. He would have them remember their former unconverted state towards God, along with their former manner of life which accompanied this state. They now had a part in this reconciliation, provided they continued in the faith, that is vested in Christ, and, not be turned by any prevailing philosophy.<sup>3</sup> They had been reconciled in the "body of His flesh by His death."<sup>4</sup> This phrase has various theories as to its meaning. Radford in giving a review of these theories notes

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 188f.

<sup>2</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. 221ff.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:21-23.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 1:22.

that it may allude to the reality of Christ's human nature to combat Docetism. He says this is doubtful.<sup>1</sup> It may have been inserted to remind them of their atoning sacrifice, at which Greek philosophy would reject. It also may be used to differentiate between the earthly body of Christ and His mystical body, that of the church. Lastly, it may have been directed toward those errorists at Colossae who were giving angels the credit in the work of reconciliation. But Radford very well says:

On the whole it is best to take the phrase as laying stress on the real humanity of Christ as an integral part of the work of reconciliation, without any deliberate reference to any particular heresy which ignored or depreciated that human instrument of reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

Paul gives the scope of this gospel, the same one which was preached to the Colossians, as having been preached to "every creature under heaven."<sup>3</sup> Whether this expression be a hyperbole, or whether it be taken as a literal expression is a matter of conjecture.<sup>4</sup> The point that Paul wants to impress upon the Colossians is that his gospel was world wide. Thus he gives them more confidence in his gospel, and shows how insignificant the false teaching compares to his universal proclamation.

Paul is led to elaborate on his work as a minister

<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 191f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 192.                      <sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:23b.

<sup>4</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 89.

of the gospel of Christ. Although this section may be a parenthetical expression in the midst of his instructions, nevertheless it adds significance and enforcement to the epistle.<sup>1</sup> There is one word, especially, which plays a prominent part in this section and the epistle. The word is "mystery". It is used three times in this section.<sup>2</sup> In declaring the work of his divine office Paul says, "of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints"<sup>3</sup> Scott reviews the word in its hortical setting in the following:

The word 'mystery' originated in the Pagan religions, where it played such a great part that the cults of the Hellenistic age are usually known as the 'mystery religion'. It was assumed that every part of worship consisted of two parts. On the one hand there were public ceremonies and accepted beliefs which were open to all. On the other hand there were certain esoteric rites and doctrines which were divulged only to chosen initiates under seal of secrecy - a seal so faithfully kept that to this day we cannot do more than guess at the inner nature of these religions.<sup>4</sup>

Peake on the other hand believes the word is used here in a general sense without reference to any particular group.<sup>5</sup> Abbott holds the same view.<sup>6</sup> The word does seem

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1:24-2:6.    <sup>2</sup>Colossians 1:2b, 27; 2:2.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1: 26.

<sup>4</sup>E. F. Scott, "The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians", op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 516.

<sup>6</sup>T. K. Abbott, op. cit., p. 233.

to strike home, whether it be used in a special or general sense; for the mystery of the ages is made manifest to the saints. It was Paul's special task to make known the solution to this mystery to the Gentiles. He speaks of the glory of this mystery as, "Christ in you, the hope of glory".<sup>1</sup> "The wealth of this glory dims into nothing the false claims of Gnostics and Agnostics to superior light and knowledge."<sup>2</sup> There is no further mystery or flights into fantasy by wierd speculative philosophies, but all is solved in Christ. They had the solution to all mystery if Christ, God's revelation of mystery, dwelt in them. Thus Paul's energy was devoted in showing the Gentile world the true mystery, which was God's revelation. Gentiles need no longer speculate about the unknown mysteries of the universe for all had been made known in Christ. Paul had indirectly made known this mystery to the district of Colossae by Epaphras.<sup>3</sup>

The third phrase containing the word "mystery" seems to indicate that Paul was using the word in a special sense. He speaks of the Colossians, that they have "all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 1: 27b.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 102

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1: 7.

with beguiling speech."<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the false teachers were contending that Christ did not reveal all mysteries and knowledge; but that he was only an initiation toward the revelation of mystery. Possibly they thought if Christ was in them He could introduce them to a higher unveiled mystery. Paul wants them to know that in Christ is all mystery, and that any knowledge concerning mystery should be more knowledge in Christ. Other knowledge, such as philosophic speculations, leads them away from Christ, thus away from the true mystery. And so even though Paul be absent from the Colossians the appointed apostle to the Gentiles would authorize his converts to be stable in Christ, progressing in Him as well as they had received Him.

Then follows the short polemical section of the doctrinal division of the epistle.<sup>2</sup> Paul refutes the philosophy which was entering into the church at Colossae. It is only here that the word "philosophy" is used in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> It did not mean philosophy in general but the philosophy which was directly related to Colossae. "It is possible that 'Colossianism' was an attempt to present the Gospel as a philosophy which could hold its own or make terms with current philosophies."<sup>4</sup> This philosophy is not

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:2b-4.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:8-15.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:8.

<sup>4</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 223f.

defined but described. It was a fallacy, because it was empty; it was of human tradition because it was formulated and imposed by human authority and it was elemental, because it dealt with beings and that which was inferior to Christ.<sup>1</sup> The term 'elemental' was originally used to denote the consecutive letters of the alphabet.<sup>2</sup> The false teachings which promoted angels and rules of asceticism were counted as nothing to Christ who possessed the fullness of the diety.<sup>3</sup> Radford explains with thoroughness, the phrase "rudiments of the world."<sup>4</sup>

Not only is philosophy contained in Christ but circumcision, by means of baptism into Christ, also finds its fullest and highest value in Him.<sup>5</sup> As for circumcision, Radford says that its place in the heresy cannot be determined.<sup>6</sup> Williams thinks that the practice may have been taken over by the errorists as a means of asceticism.<sup>7</sup> Circumcision, like philosophy, was elemental and shallow in comparison to baptism. Baptism had taken the place of circumcision so the latter was no longer needed. It cannot be known for certain whether the Jewish Christians were attempting to authorize circumcision among the Gentile

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2: 8.    <sup>2</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 223ff.    <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 121f.

<sup>6</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>7</sup>A. L. Williams, op. cit., p. 92.

Christians, or whether the latter thought that in performing the rite they were conforming more to their ascetic doctrine. Whatever the case Paul sets them straight. Paul then argues that if they have been made alive with Christ in baptism, which was by their faith in Christ, then not only circumcision but the entire law is nullified. Christ has triumphed over angels, laws, aeons, philosophies. In fact, everything was subject to Christ because He has shown their inferiority to him by his redeeming work on the cross. Only Christ has shown redemption to man.<sup>1</sup> The Colossians need not fear the domination of unseen spirits which are over and above Christ, for Christ has been given a position over all the unseen world. If the Colossians had Christ, they possessed one who had conquered all things; and in turn would enable them to conquer.<sup>2</sup>

After Paul had explained the position that Christ should have in their thought, he proceeded to tell them the position Christ should have in their life. The section on ethics logically follows the treatise on doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Philosophy, Jewish legalism and angelic systems were governing the lives of the Colossians. As a result, Christ did not have an adequate place in their minds, neither did have an adequate place in their lives. Paul was always concerned

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:14,15. <sup>2</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op.cit.,p.175.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2: 16-4:6.



with the conduct of Christians, for he realized that only as persons are new creatures in Christ are they assured of an eternal fellowship with the one who has created them anew. Therefore, he briefly instructs the Colossians in their new life in Christ. From these instructions it is possible to gain more insight into the heresy Paul is trying to combat in Colossae.

In his ethical admonitions, Paul first tells them to let no one pass judgment on them, in questions of food and drink or with regard to festival or new moon or a Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> He begins his ethical admonitions with a discussion of these Jewish rites because he finished his doctrinal section by illustrating how Christ had set aside the law with its legal demands. These were only a part, only a shadow of the real. The real belonged to Christ. It is not that these Jewish rites were not real; but that they only suggested that there was that which gave them existence. Possibly Paul was likening these Jewish rites as a shadow cast by the human body, that body being Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The next few verses are among the most puzzling in the New Testament due to the lack of information on the exact nature of the heresy.<sup>3</sup> As Scott puts it:

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:16.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:17.

<sup>3</sup>E. F. Scott, "The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians", op. cit., p. 53.

Its obscurities arise almost wholly from our ignorance of the precise nature of the Colossian heresy and especially of those Pagan elements in its teaching which were mingled with the Jewish. It is evident, however, that Paul here passes from the ordinary practices of the cult (the rules about food and drink festivals) to the more secret discipline, reserved for the initiates.<sup>1</sup>

These errorists were insisting on self-abasement and the worship of angels.<sup>2</sup> This humility was probably connected with the worship of angels, although it is not known for certain.<sup>3</sup> Neither can it be known for certain whether angel worship, in this instance, was connected in any way with the keeping of these festival rites. It could be possible, judging from subsequent verses, that the worship of angels was considered as a means to God. If one could rid himself of material desire he could make better contact with this spiritual world and thus become more spiritual. In a way, this type of religion does not sound like Jewish practices for they were too monotheistic. In fact, it does not even sound like Essenism. It seems more credible to assume that there was a Jewish influence working in the thinking of these errorists, but that it was the submerged element. The environment, even without Judaism, had a highly developed angel worship. Angel worship was a part of the religious practices of the people of the area.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:18.

<sup>3</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 247.

This is brought out by a study of the native religions as reviewed in Chapter One of this study. However, Paul calls this sort of thinking as "visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind."<sup>1</sup> These errorists, by their higher knowledge which they regarded superior faith, were assuming a dictatorial attitude which led them to feel superior to those who possessed only faith. Paul not only described them, but he regards them as not holding fast to the head of the church Christ.<sup>2</sup> The church as a body must hold fast to the head to maintain a healthy anatomy.

Paul then refutes the ascetic regulation of these gnostics.<sup>3</sup> These ascetic commands and regulations were used with the idea of freeing themselves from the material world which was thought to be sinful. The more one could free himself of the material body, the more one could gain knowledge of the angelic spiritual world. The person was considered in a superior state to those who had faith. Paul regards these practices as pertaining to the world. They were developed by human reasoning. They were in the kindergarten stage of religion as compared to the authorized scholarship found in Christ.<sup>4</sup> It may have been Essenism but it seems that Paul would have been more specific if this be the case. Paul says that these practices look

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:18.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 2:19.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 2:20-23.

<sup>4</sup>A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 138.

dignified, but that in reality the very purpose for which they were inaugurated is the very thing they do not accomplish.<sup>1</sup> Nothing less than a new person is able to change the persons mind and actions, and they were made new by the Christ with which they were buried and raised in the action of baptism.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Paul admonishes the Colossians to seek the things above for that is where Christ is. They, by their baptism, should think of already living in that same sphere; for someday they would actually be there by virtue of Christ.<sup>3</sup> They should not be like these false teachers who were still mingling with earthy practices. The Christian need not to invent gnostic systems or ascetic regulations to reach the heavenly spheres, for they had already been potentially raised by and with Christ who dwelt in heaven and at the right hand of God.

Since the Christian is a new person, he should put off the old earthly man which lives according to earthly purposes and should put on the new man which has been raised with Christ to live in heavenly spheres.<sup>4</sup> Paul gives a list of practices that were commonly engaged in at his time by the pagan world.<sup>5</sup> These are of the old man and should be "put to death."<sup>6</sup> This new man thus will be

<sup>1</sup>Colossians 2:23. <sup>2</sup>A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 523.

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 3:1. <sup>4</sup>Colossians 3:1-4.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 3:5-9 <sup>6</sup>Colossians 3:5

renewed in them. However, it is renewed in the "knowledge after the image of its creator" instead of the false knowledge of the errorists.<sup>1</sup> In this new man there is no distinction of "Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all."<sup>2</sup> In this one statement Paul does away with all divisions made in the church by Gnostic systems, Jewish rites, nationalities and class; and, not only that, he unites them in Christ.

Paul now turns to the new man and lists some of the characteristics of this man.<sup>3</sup> Christian love is the perfect binding element among them; the peace of God is the uniting element among them and the word of God is the rule of conduct among them.<sup>4</sup> Whatever they do they are to do in the name of the Lord Jesus. How different this rule of action is in comparison to the practices of the false teachers. As their nature was of Christ, so did their activity which proceeded from that nature bear affinity with it.

Paul then describes the life of a Christian family.<sup>5</sup> The relationship of slaves to the family are especially described, this being due to the circumstances existing

<sup>1</sup> A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 3:11      <sup>3</sup> Colossians 3:12-18.

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 3:14-16.      <sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:22-25

between Philemon and Onesimus. As all Christians were to function as Christ in them, so also the slaves were to work for the Lord, though obeying their masters.<sup>1</sup> Paul always thinks in terms of the ultimate outcome of the Christian life and the eternal reward awaiting those who were in Christ.

Following this section there are short injunctions to the Colossians.<sup>2</sup> They were to continue in prayer, especially for Paul, that a new door would be opened to him.<sup>3</sup> He describes himself as in prison.<sup>4</sup> He closes his instructions to them by advising them in their conduct toward outsiders.<sup>5</sup> Following this comes the personal reports which have already been noted in the first chapter.

In the last verse of the letter Paul says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand."<sup>6</sup> Someone else had probably written the letter up to this point, Paul dictating it. It was his personal signature, showing that it was his personal letter. His bonds establish a better claim for his hearing and shows what he was doing for them, while grace shows to them what God was doing and had done for all of them, including Paul.

This ends the study of the Colossian epistle. This

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<sup>1</sup>Colossians 4:2-6.

<sup>2</sup>Colossians 4:3,4

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 4:3b.

<sup>4</sup>Colossians 4:5,6

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 4:18

<sup>6</sup>Colossians 4:18.

chapter, especially, has been limited and the wealth of the material contained in the contents of the letter scarcely been fathomed. Some of the more pertinent sections of the epistle have been given more attention than others. However, any part of this study has just been the stepping stone to any part of the epistle.

## CONCLUSION

The investigation of Colossians dealt with four specific phases of study as designated by the four chapters. These studies by no means included all the problems concerned with Colossians, or was any one exhaustively treated. It is admitted there were limitations, but this was of necessity. However, in the presentation of each problem selected the most noted theories to the problem were discussed and analyzed.

Chapter I formed the background of the study. In this chapter attention was given to the historical and geographical region of Colossae. This study was elementary, but did serve to form a background for the religious activities of the region of Colossae, preparation was made for a better understanding and interpretation of the existing conditions which prompted Paul to write the Colossian epistle. In this introductory study special attention was given to the earliest history of the church. Since Paul lists quite a few of his fellow workers in the last chapter of the epistle, examination was made into the labors of these companions to note what relation, if any, existed between them and the Colossian church.

The second chapter was a study of authorship. In this chapter the various theories of authorship were reviewed with the reasons for the acceptance and rejection



of each theory. Even though Pauline authorship is accepted, the place from which Paul wrote this letter has been conjectured. The three theories as to where Paul wrote this epistle were given examination, with the names of the most prominent scholars advocating each theory. Also, reasons for the rejection of each theory were given.

The third chapter was a more direct study of conditions which existed in the Colossian Church that prompted Paul to write instructions to correct such false teachings. The main purpose of this chapter was to discern the conditions existing in Colossae which prompted the writing of the epistle to that insignificant town. To determine these existing conditions both the text of the epistle and scholar's investigations were examined. The conclusion as to the identification of the errorists was not a precise one by any means, but there seemed to be a Gnostic flavoring as well as Jewish teaching in the heresy.

The fourth chapter was an investigation of the analysis and contents of the epistle with an interpretation of such depending upon the preceeding studies. This chapter was, no doubt, the most valuable, because it was the most practical. Although the examination of the contents was limited, it did give the pertinency of the main ideas of the epistle as they related to the correction of the false teaching being done at Colossae. Only the most important sections which bring to light the probable nature of the

false teaching at Colossae were studied.

The entire study thus far has been concerned with investigation relating to the past. However, the epistle must be related to present day Christianity if it would have any value for Christians. The value of the epistle for today may be given by the phrase "The adequacy of Christ for all ages." When Paul wrote this epistle there were those at Colossae who would not depend solely upon Christ for salvation, but thought that there must be additional teachings and ethics if a salvation were to be assured. Paul attempted to teach these misinformed Christians that Christ could be depended for their salvation, in fact, Christ was the only source of God's salvation for men. Since this is true Christ alone should be taught both as a doctrine and as ethic for Christian life.

Today the world is seeking salvation in other systems and processes, some of which attempt to ignore Christ as the salvation and others which attempt to surpass Christ, regarding Christianity as antedoted. For those who might be tempted either to ignore Christ as a salvation or to consider Him as not sufficient for salvation, this epistle has a present day value. "Christ is all and in all." Christ is sufficient for the problems of life, both individual and cooperative, for today. The Christian need not fear science, new ethical systems or world conditions because if they are in Christ they are secure.

Since Christ is the sole salvation for Christians today, as He was when Paul wrote, He must be given priority in teaching and in life. This does not mean that we must stop the progress of civilization or feel content to live in ignorance or in the superstitions of past ages, but that everything which is accomplished to perfect man is done in the name of Christ, who has given man the incentive to culminate his perfection.

Christ still remains the mediator between man and God. If God has seen fit to present Christ to man as the salvation for all ages so is He presenting Christ today as man's salvation. When Christ comes into man's life man is changed, and becomes as God would have him. Everything else in life might be desirable, but there is nothing else necessary for man but to have in him the spirit of the living Christ who is able to transform life today, with the promise to preserve it into eternity.

## APPENDIX

In the Colossian correspondence there is mentioned a letter to the Laodiceans.<sup>1</sup> The two epistles were to be interchanged between the two churches.<sup>2</sup> The exact identification of the Laodicean letter is still under investigation. Evidently Paul did write them. However, there are various theories as to the nature of this letter. There are three basic theories in regard to the identification of the Laodicean Epistle.

The first theory is that it was an epistle written by the Laodiceans to Paul, to Epaphras or to Colossae. Lightfoot explains that "the underlying motive of this interpolation was to withdraw the support which the apocryphal epistle seemed to derive from this reference, without being obliged at the same time to postulate a lost epistle of St. Paul."<sup>3</sup>

This first theory has been discredited due to the impracticability of it. In the first place, the two letters were companion epistles obviously sent from the author to the people. If the letter was written by the Laodiceans to Paul, why would he consider the two epistles as having any

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 4:16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 273.

bearing on one another? Then too, Paul would not know whether the Laodiceans had kept a copy of the letter sent to him. This theory seems weak and insufficient to bear any weight.<sup>1</sup>

The second theory regarding the Laodicean writing is that it was an epistle written by Paul from Laodicea. This letter has been identified as I Timothy, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, or Galatians. By identifying the epistle with one of these canonical writings there is no need to postulate a lost apostolic writing. Although there may be faint traces of this epistle in connection with these other writings, there is no direct evidence which identifies anyone of them with the letter connected with Laodicea. Lightfoot sums the objections to this theory in the following:

- (1) It does not appear that St. Paul had ever been at Laodicea when he wrote the letter to the Colossians.
- (2) All the epistles thus singled out are separated from the Colossian letter by an interval of some years at least.
- (3) In every case they can with a high degree of probability be shown to have written elsewhere than at Laodicea. Indeed, as St. Paul had been long a prisoner either at Caesarea or Rome, when he wrote to Colossae, he could not have dispatched a letter recently from Laodicea.<sup>2</sup>

The third theory postulates an epistle addressed to the Laodiceans by John, the apostle. This epistle is sometimes identified as I John. Another view is that it was an epistle written to the Laodiceans by one of Paul's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

companions, possibly Luke or Epaphras. Then there is the possibility it was written by Paul himself. If the latter be so, the epistle in question is lost; or is one of our canonical epistles, possibly Hebrews, Philemon or Ephesians or is the apocryphal epistle which is connected with Laodicea. Very few accept the possibility that the epistle can be identified with I John. Neither does it seem tenable that the epistle was written by one of Paul's companions. The apocryphal epistle, which is designated as the Epistle to the Laodiceans, is a recognized forgery. It was written to supply the need of a Laodicean letter. Evidently someone was perturbed about the absence of such a letter and set about to supply the need. It is composed of a number of typical Pauline phrases lifted chiefly from the Philippian letter, with injections interspersed from the Galatian epistle. Of course, there is a closing injunction to exchange this epistle with the Colossians. Lightfoot lists the manuscripts which contain this Laodicean epistle.<sup>1</sup> The letter probably had a greater circulation in the West than in the East. It retained a place in many manuscripts of the Pauline writings from the sixth to the fifteenth century, though there were scholars who doubted its canonicity, yet did not deny Pauline authorship. Lightfoot, who apparently presents a more exhausting study on the apocryphal epistle, finally concludes this of it:

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<sup>1</sup>  
Ibid.

Thus for more than nine centuries this forged epistle hovered about the doors of the sacred Canon, without either finding admission or being peremptorily excluded. At length the revival of learning dealt its death--blow to this as to so many other spurious pretensions. As a rule, Roman Catholics and Reformers were equally strong in their condemnation of its worthlessness.....The dawn of the Reformation epoch had effectually scared away this ghost of a Pauline epistle, which (we may confidently hope) has been laid forever and will not again be suffered to haunt the mind of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Radford, in his commentary, includes an English translation of the spurious Laodicean epistle.<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot devotes an extensive study to the epistle and his work contains valuable information for one who would wish to engage in a special study of it.<sup>3</sup>

The only proposition that remains is that Paul wrote to the Laodiceans. Since this epistle is not the apocryphal work, then either the letter has been lost or it is one of Paul's works which is included in our present canon. The first part of this theory is plausible, and can be given support. However, Lightfoot believes that such a letter would not be lost; therefore, it can be identified as one of the letters in our present canon. If this be the case the letter to the Laodiceans can be identified as Hebrews, Philemon or Ephesians.

On comparing Hebrews with Colossians one immediately

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 297, 298.

<sup>2</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, op. cit., pp. 272-298.

notes the difference in nature and content between the two letters. This is the best reason why Hebrews is not the Laodicean work, which work was interwoven with the Colossian problem. However, since Hebrews is doubted by most modern scholars as being Pauline, there is no justification to continue in this line of reasoning.

The Epistle to Philemon has been identified as the Laodicean letter on the basis that Philemon lived at Laodicea, and that the letter was addressed to the whole church. Such a private letter would not be one containing information to another church, and this letter had little bearing upon the problems confronting the church at Colossae.

The most prominent theory is that the Laodicean letter is commonly known in our canon as the Epistle to the Ephesians. Harnack, in 1910, propounded the theory that our Ephesian letter is really the original Laodicean epistle. "Marcion's copy of Ephesians, about A. D. 140, bore the title of 'the epistle to the Laodiceans'".<sup>1</sup> Because of the condemnation upon the church of Laodicea by John in Revelation, it is reasoned that the epistle did not bear the name of the city after the second century. It was an ancient custom to erase any disgraced names from Christian documents even though these persons or places formerly were distinguished. However, Ephesus, possessing a copy of the letter did not

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<sup>1</sup> L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 30.



want it to go without any designation so added its own. It was a circular letter anyway. The two oldest Greek manuscripts, the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus, do not have the words, "in Ephesus".<sup>1</sup> Even Ephesus may not have attached its name to the letter, but in time tradition pointed to that place for its identification. There is one flaw in this brilliant theory of Harnack's. Laodicea did regain its good name before the end of the second century. Why, then, did the letter not again bear the name of the city?

There may have been an uncertainty of address connected with the Laodicean letter. It may have been a circular letter to churches of Asia with a space left for each church to insert its name. Since Colossae received a personal letter from Paul, it is supposed that the circular letter was not sent to them directly yet could profit them if they were to read it. Then too, there may have been only one manuscript which was left at each church to copy if it wished. Colossae was invited to read it, and had ample opportunity to copy it as did the other churches. Laodicea may have been the circulation agent for the epistle. Thus this city was named to identify it. If a circular letter is postulated there may have been numerous ways by which it was to reach Colossae. The language in Colossians,

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<sup>1</sup> A. T. Robertson, op. cit., p. 29.

however, seems to point to a definite letter, much like the one to the Colossians. The letter may have been written to Laodicea, but in circulation the personal frills may have been dropped; only the doctrinal sections being circulated. This letter may have been preserved at Ephesus, thus this city's name becoming attached to it. Our canonical Ephesians would easily fit into the class of a circular letter. Radford believes that Ephesians is much too sweeping to be addressed to one church, even Ephesus.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the case, an identification of the Laodicean epistle is not yet exact. A more intensive study would involve more time and space than is advisable in this study. A more thorough investigation would involve a separate study.

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<sup>1</sup>L. B. Radford, op. cit., p. 10.

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